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The Things of Spring

• Claude Koch

The last elusive freeze was in April around the twelfth, by mid-afternoon simply a bite in air, a slight bewilderment in high sunlight. "Unseasonable," everyone said, though it happened every year. On the playing fields of St. Praed's, parents in light topcoats and young girls cocooned in their huge brothers' sweaters lingered through the season's first track meet, standing as indolently in small far groups as those tranquil figures on the Plaza of St. Mark's across a canvas by Canaletto or Bellini. Light and dark blues of St. Praed's, pale blue and white of DeCourcy—all cooling colors despite the sun, except for the odd high yellow-green of a peeled and tinted arching trunk of sycamore beyond the field against dark conifers that held the eye, a summer spot above the milers pacing there—yellow forsythia so distant and so spare they seemed like stringed butterflies rising from the grass against Old Hall, and chaste tone and even voices and the low horizon of the hills beyond Fiddlers Run to the west composed the spacious afternoon, elements of order and reserve.

But runners rounding the final turn revoked all that. Their anguish that distance had obscured, the heated pounding of their feet, the bodies unstringing like spent dolls, startled those onlookers into sympathy and wonder. A slight woman in a flopping rose-shaded hat pressed a hand to her mouth, and the clerkish man on whose arm she leaned wondered with a familiar catch at the heart if this was what the afternoon was meant to do.

ii

Young Tilden came out early, while the managers were manhandling low hurdles and raking the broad jump pit. They were his classmates in Upper School, but he turned away from them, bundled in his sweatsuit with his heart feathering and his mouth puckered and dry. His legs were like water under him for his first varsity meet. He cut across the field fanned with young green and heard grackles singing fantasies they would forget by May in the boxhedge under the Headmaster's window. At the far bend of the track where he would start his "kick" in an hour or so, he tried to think how it would be, but he could not imagine himself thrust in a pack of runners—only far behind, pulled to earth by the constriction of his chest and the weight of a tumbling heart. There were apple trees beyond Middle School under which he could stretch and, while a squirrel ticked above him, fall asleep until it was over, forgetting and forgotten—if he kept walking. . . .

He had not noticed before how dark and speckled the branches of the apple trees were and how the buds spread like casual rain. He sat against a trunk, all his senses animal-sharp, and pulled his long legs up against

his chest, hugging them and shivering.

His parents would be out there soon. "Youngsters running about in their BVD's," his father had remarked the night before at supper; "I never could see what it was all about." It was the way he said something wry, his head bent to his plate and his voice muffled, as though he were dead sure no one would even smile—though they always did; and now he was confessing he'd never seen a track meet: "Not in all my life."

"Your father and I are hardly the athletic type, Billy."

Young Tilden was frightened into a detachment like a dream's, so that this time he thought of them without the lonely dryness in his chest of the last year or so whose meaning he could never comprehend. He was sixteen, and his parents seemed to be receding from him, growing stranger and more frail, though their physical appearance hardly changed. His mother now—he breathed deeply to still the unnerving throb of his breath and filled his thought with the fragrance of all the springs of his life—his mother he could see quite clearly as though she were stepping toward him through the lattice of low branches that protected him from field and track. She was bent slightly at the waist, and she pressed her hand to her side; but her face under the odd loped brim of the rose-colored hat she'd made herself was serene. Why did she hold her hand so to her side? She never spoke of herself alone, and sometimes he felt that both he and his father were performing before her—that she'd taken that part on herself in her life, to be an audience of one to applaud them. Such crazy thoughts he'd been having, as though the whole world were changing and not just the season. . . .

He closed his eyes to slits, and the managers diminished and the track was far away. Thrusting his hands underneath his jersey and rolling the cloth up around them he pulled something in to protect himself. Is this what his mother did? He'd held his scholarship for a year now, and as far as he knew, his summer work had paid the extra costs, if that was it. He dropped his head back against the trunk and closed his eyes, and projected on the lids he saw himself rising and walking away, though he did not know where. Perhaps he dozed, forgetting where he was. When he opened his eyes, it was to the illusion of a bright figure tangled in the branches of the flowering trees, while birds sang the scents of other flowers, not yet there, up from the earth of his youngest memories.

"Son," the figure disengaged from the trees, and young Tilden saw that its jeweled and wavering outlines were compounded of his tears, "what are you doing out here?"

"I'm scared, Coach," he said, startled into a frankness that bewildered him. He rubbed his sweat jersey over his eyes, busy with it longer than his shame required.

The man held out a hand and swung Tilden to his feet. "Your mother and dad are out there. I was just talking to them." He was a wiry, little middle-aged person, with eyes and skin tightened as though to shield himself from sunlight or dust that might rise like a whirlwind at any moment.

He squinted up at Tilden. "You're going to be a runner," he said. "You've got what it takes to be up there with the best of them."

The boy bowed his head and smiled like his father. They walked in, bend-

ing under the blossoming limbs. It kept him occupied so that he need not answer and need not look at his coach. He thought how it was true that they all protected him, but from what he could not know. They came out of the grove, and the greensward spread, field beyond expansive field, through the largess of bright air to the low evergreen horizon and the town. A pole vaulter lifted himself with a lazy, blue insouciance into that air, and the thin edge of applause drifted like a scattered code to where they stood. His parents were alone by the starter's position at the track. He saw the flopping brim of his mother's hat and his father, leaning on the stick he would have picked up out of habit when he touched the hem of the country. No one else was there, but they waited for him. The spectators had followed the shotput and pole vault and the broad jump across the field.

"How did you know where I was, Coach?"

The crow's-feet deepened by the little man's eyes, and before they had closed in a nod and a smile, young Tilden saw himself fully reflected in the pupils, framed in an iris as blue as the numbers of DeCourcy. "Go on, son," the coach waved to his parents, "talk to them, and then come over here, and I'll give you a few tips."

iii

"You look fine," his mother said. "I like those uniforms."

"Suits," said his father; "you call them track suits." He lifted a heel and picked at it with his stick. "I've been boning up on these things."

"I'm not going to do so well," Tilden said. "I'm pretty nervous."

"He'll be all right once he gets started, Bob." The familiar phrase was what his mother would say.

"Your coach was talking to us. He's a quiet little man." His father spoke to his mother, but young Tilden knew it was for his benefit. "I didn't expect that." His father's approval was always indirect. Now he raised his eyes to the boy and smiled, and looked quickly to his wife again. "He spoke to us because he said he saw the family resemblance. Imagine that!"

"But you're not scared," Tilden said.

"Most of my life, Bill," his father said, "about one thing or another."

"Now, now." His mother lifted two small hands, with the knuckles puckered and slightly swollen, and folded the flaps of his hood under his chin. "Everyone is nervous at first." She patted his hair up under the hood. "And your father has made out all right, no matter what *he* says." This with the little smile that brought her lips together in what would have been a kiss when he was younger. But her remark was for his father, and Tilden, still as alert and vulnerable as a young animal in his fear, wondered that they spoke to each other through him, and to him through each other. Was that a family resemblance too? He'd never noticed it before.

"I'm going to be sick," he said.

"Sit down on that log, son, and put your head between your knees—"

But before he could obey, he heard the starter calling through his megaphone: "Milers up! Milers up!"

His heart flopped over like a live fish trapped in his chest.

"Well, Mother, I guess this is it," he heard his father say.

Licking his dry lips and pulling the jersey against his errant heart again, young Tilden attempted a smile. He had a fly glimpse of his father's fingers tightened so that the knuckle bones stood out white on the stick, and his mother with a thin hand held to her flopping hat. He wished he could comfort them. The lower field spread, empty, behind them; and if the grackles sang, it was far away toward a sunburst high in the dark evergreens. He felt the cold of some other season.

iv

The first lap settled him down. There were seven in the race, and he kept his position at number four. At first he gulped air and lost his stride, but then he saw that the others did not immediately pull outrageously ahead of him as he was convinced they would, despite all his coach had said. Number three paced him, and he kept outside the boy's loose, jogging step, that beat like a metronome in a dream.

At the last turn of the second lap, he began to pick out voices, and he strove for a second wind.

At the last turn of the third lap, when it seemed that whatever had possessed and obstructed his chest would burst and fly into the sun burning there and not in the far trees of his memory, he had his second wind. Out of a corner of his eye he caught a patch of red. His coach's voice rose up as the red went by on one side: "Last lap, son . . . last . . .!" He had not heard the gun. Blurring into the distance before the immediate antagonist, the two leading runners moved hopelessly beyond his reach. He turned the far curve. Someone there was crying "Kick . . . kick . . .!" To him? The voice was strange. But he did, though it was not where he had planned.

Almost immediately he knew it was too soon, and the yards unraveled slower and slower, like tendons separating from his body and caught on a spindle far away. Suddenly the man before him lurched, and he felt the thud of the uneven step as a blow against his temples, while his blood or a red patch he vaguely placed in space bleared in his eyes, and there was nothing else before him except distance like a void in which he would drown and the track an incomprehensible corridor down which he fell grotesquely because so slowly and painfully. And then his fall was absolute, and he grunted and vomited as the field spun away.

v

"Didn't I make it?" he said. "Didn't I make it?"

"Of course you did," his coach draped a sweatshirt around his shoulders. "You kicked too soon, is all . . ."

"Where . . .?" he leaned on the little man's arm and looked beyond him to where, at some distance, his parents stood.

"Not bad, boy," his coach said, "third place in your first meet . . ."

They were straining toward him, though they did not move. Young Tilden said, "Thank you, Coach," and stepped over on the grass. Then they moved, coming tentatively toward him, almost apologetically. He knew that he would be able to say nothing to them about how they had waited and how he had striven, though some day he might say it through another.

The Threat

• J. F. Hopkins

Nate Kramer was at The Rook every Saturday night. He preferred to stand around outside until darkness set in. He usually had three or four of the kids for company. The night the little old white woman stopped to speak to him he happened to be alone. He was accustomed to having older white men stop and say, "Pardon me, but didn't I used to see you on television? Weren't you a football player?" So he wasn't exactly surprised when the woman stopped. But what she said surprised him. "I bet you can take care of yourself."

He was leaning against the wall but even so, he towered over her. For an old woman—he guessed she was a little past seventy—she was easy to look at. She probably lived in the Cavanaugh apartments, in the next block. It was full of old white women, but there weren't many like this one.

He knew what she meant but pretended that he didn't. "What do you mean, ma'am?"

"In a fight," she said. "I bet you could take care of yourself in a fight."

"Not me, ma'am. I'm a peace-loving man."

"I mean if you had to. If you got in a fight, you could really take care of yourself."

He didn't answer. He only smiled, in the hope she would move on.

"What's a big guy like you always hanging around an outfit like this for, if I may ask?" She gestured—and he noted and appreciated the gracefulness of the gesture—towards The Rook.

He laughed, partly because of her calling The Rook an outfit. It differed from the other coffee houses only in its proximity to the home of the district attorney. That was the only reason a cop from the Juvenile Aid Division was assigned to it. The owner soon stopped complaining about the special attention. Big Nate became a drawing card.

The fact that he had been an outstanding football player didn't impress the kids. It didn't seem to impress Nate either. If he took being a cop seriously, it didn't show. It helped that he wasn't in uniform and that he found it easy to smile, and it also helped that he was a Negro, a very black one. Like all the coffee houses, The Rook was interracial, although sometimes you wouldn't know it. Whites predominated. A colored cop was easier to accept than a white one.

"For God's sake, you don't look like the characters I see going into this place. Do you work here or what? Is that it? You work here?"

"In a way."

"I thought only bars needed bouncers. These fairies never stir up any real trouble, do they?"

He wondered whether she knew what a fairy was. "What makes you think I'm a bouncer?"

"Are you kidding? From the size of you, you ought to be able to bounce the bouncer."

He laughed. "Like I say, I'm a peace-loving man."

"I'm sure you are. A man as big as you are doesn't go around looking for trouble. A real guy doesn't."

Nate smiled self-consciously. He weighed various excuses for wishing her goodnight and going inside The Rook. But he had reasons for staying where he was, too. He wanted to compliment her on her appearance but didn't know what to say. She had a way of using her hands that was very graceful and they were very young-looking hands. She had a very pleasant voice and he would have liked to tell her that too.

"You never have answered my question," she said.

"Ma'am, you've asked a lot of questions."

Her look said maybe she had and maybe she hadn't but either way it was her privilege.

"About taking care of yourself in a fight. That was the one you passed off by saying you were a peace-loving man."

"As I recall, you made a comment. You didn't ask a question."

"Oh, my. I'm dealing with a grammarian, I see."

"Hardly. I went to Michigan State on a football scholarship. I didn't take any of the academic prizes."

"Now the truth is coming out. You are an athlete."

"*Was* an athlete."

"An athlete and a grammarian. You look as though you could take that ball through the middle of the line right now."

"My job was to bring down that man with the ball, ma'am. Even the pros—and I was a pro for six years—don't have two hundred and seventy-five pound ball carriers."

"Is that how much you weigh? Two hundred and seventy-five pounds?" She sounded incredulous.

"As a matter of fact, I'm within a pound or two of three hundred. I'm not in the best of shape."

"But you wouldn't have any trouble handling three or four of these characters I'm sure." She indicated The Rook.

"Ma'am, I'm not really a bouncer. To tell you the truth, I'm a policeman. I'm with the Juvenile Aid Division."

"You're a policeman?" She looked at him in mocked horror. "Well, I was really going to put my foot in it."

"How is that?"

She leaned back and laughed. It was the laugh of a far younger person. He liked the sound of it. My God, as a young woman she must have been something, he thought.

"I was going to see how you felt about throwing a good scare into somebody for me—threaten to beat him up. But I guess as a policeman you could hardly do that."

Had he heard correctly? He knew that he had. He also knew that she was serious.

"You're putting me on," he said. "I know a nice lady like you wouldn't want me to do anything like that."

"Oh, yes I would. I didn't say beat him up. I just said threaten to beat him up. I tell you he'd die on the spot. Oh, how I'd love to see that!"

She again leaned back and laughed. Her laughter carried all the way across the street. He saw passers-by looking over. She gave him a good-natured poke on the arm.

"Don't look so worried," she said. "You're as bad as my son. I don't mean actually die. I mean he'd collapse. He'd shake all over. He'd be the most scared man in Philadelphia!"

Quite clearly, her mental image of the intimidated man's terror was providing her with more pleasure than she had had in many a day.

"Your son looking worried—did it have any connection with this idea of yours to threaten this man with a beating?"

"My son won't so much as speak to the manager about him." A downward flip of her hand indicated that no belligerent action could be expected of her son. " 'Mother, he'd sue me for every cent I have.' "

Nate was sure it was a good imitation.

"It sounds to me like your son has a lot of good common sense."

The woman didn't look as though she rated common sense very highly.

"I never brought him up to be a coward," she said. "I brought him up to stand on his own two feet and speak up to people. I always have."

"I'm sure you have."

"He's not nearly as big as you but he's six feet two and two hundred pounds and he won't tell off that little pipsqueak Roy."

"Maybe your son's like I am, a peace-loving man. But you haven't told me who Roy is."

Two of the regulars came along, a bearded man in his early twenties and his girl friend, a nurse in uniform. Nate knew him only as Ben. Ben was found of shocking people, a favorite technique being to follow a respectable sentence with an outrageous one. He surprised Nate by passing into The Rook without first commenting on Nate's companion.

"I've seen that combination before," she said. "With a boy friend like that, I wouldn't want her for a nurse."

"Oh, they're all right," said Nate. "He just likes to drop a four-letter word now and then where it'll make the biggest splash."

"If he drops any four-letter word in front of me. I'll drop him."

Nate laughed. "Ma'am, I don't know who this Roy is or what he's done, but you don't need me or your son to take care of him. You can do the job."

"A couple of years ago," she said, "I could more than hold my own. I'd have told him off . . ." She paused. For the first time, she seemed sad, sorry for herself. "Never get old, big man. It's no fun."

"You can still hold your own," he protested. "More than hold your own. I think you're remarkable."

He was happy to see that she was pleased.

"I go at a snail's pace, with this heart condition," she said. "It drives people crazy to walk with me. I can't help it. I can't go any faster."

"You just take it easy. No need for you to rush, is there?"

"No, I can't rush. If my life depended on it, I couldn't rush. That's what my life depends on—not rushing. It takes me forever to get anywhere. I was on my way to the square to sit awhile, when I saw you didn't have anybody with you. Usually you have two or three of the Great Unwashed for company. That's what my son calls them."

"There aren't many in that category who come in here. There really aren't. Where you're going—over there in the park—that's where you see the Unwashed."

"Don't I know it? They practically own it there in the middle. But there are still some decent people who sit in the square. They just stay away from the middle, that's all. Well, if I'm to get over there while it's still light, I had better be on my way."

"You're leaving me high and dry wondering who this Roy is."

"I'll tell you some other time. You weren't going to do anything about it anyway."

"That's the truth. You listen to that son of yours now. He's got a lot of common sense."

She gave a little wave which both said goodbye and denied that her son's common sense was an attribute.

Whoever this Roy was, the son should have done something. Not hit him surely, nor even threatened to hit him but something. Straighten the matter out. But then he thought it was better not to jump to conclusions. The old lady might well be a difficult customer. She had a tongue in her head and was probably as demanding as hell and used to getting her own way. But he looked after her, as she walked down the block, fondly. She had more life in her than most of the kids who sat around in The Rook by the hour.

She was walking as slowly as she said she did. He could see that it would be maddening for a person accustomed to a normal pace to try to walk with her.

He suddenly became aware she had come to a dead halt. She was standing at the end of the block. She stood as though frozen. He grew alarmed. It wasn't the posture of someone satisfying her curiosity about something. She gave the impression of being in great pain.

"Hey, lady, are you all right?" he called. He took a few tentative steps towards her, and when she didn't turn, he broke into a trot.

It was clear that she was having an attack of some kind. He saw no reason to take hold of her. She was obviously in great pain but in no danger of falling. She wasn't quite as still as she had appeared to be at a distance. Her fingers were fumbling with her purse.

"I'll open that," he said. "Is there medicine in here?"

She nodded. "Pills," she said.

He saw the plastic container immediately.

"Are these the ones?"

She reached for it, nodding, and he quickly withdrew one of the pills and held it to her mouth. "I'll get that nurse," he said. "Will you be O.K. if I leave you for a few seconds?"

The movement of her head was slight, but there was vehemence in it, and he knew if there was one thing she didn't want it was that nurse. If the attractiveness had gone out of her, the spirit hadn't.

"I'll be all right. Just let me stand here awhile."

"Are you sure you don't need a doctor?" He was now reasonably sure she didn't. He could tell she had been through these things before.

"No, I'll be all right."

He stood with her and tried to come up with the name of the kind of pill that heart patients take. It was probably that kind of pill. He had read or heard about it somewhere. The first-aid course? Whatever it was, it was working. The pain was subsiding, he could tell. She continued to stand very still. The name came to him: nitroglycerin tablets.

"I think I'd better go home," she said.

"I'll walk you back."

Under the circumstances, he didn't find the pace maddening. She occasionally stopped to rest. The effect of the pill was remarkable. He was amazed that she had recovered so well.

"I live in the Cavanaugh."

"It seems like a very nice building.

I imagine you're quite comfortable there."

She grimaced. "I would be, if it weren't for that Roy."

"Roy works there?"

"He doesn't work! He just devils me. That's all he does."

"What's he paid to do? He's surely not paid to devil you."

"Oh, he's in charge of the maintenance men or something. I don't think he could raise a stuck window by himself. But he can bang on the pipes at six in the morning, just when I'm finally getting to sleep, or stomp around the floor above me at all hours."

They had stopped in front of a delicatessen.

"I eat in here sometimes, but it's too expensive," she said.

She had probably never looked at the autographed pictures of the star players of the last fifteen years on the local pro team. There was one of himself. The owner, Weinberg, was a pro-football nut.

"You said stomp around on the floor above you. He doesn't live there, does he? On the floor above you?"

"He might just as well. The old woman who does live there, Mrs. Byrnes—she must be ninety—has been in a nursing home for months. So he simply moved in and made himself comfortable."

"You know this for a fact?"

"You're as bad as my son. That's the kind of question he would ask. Well, I might not be able to prove it in court but he's up there all right. It's nobody else up there stomping around, just to devil me."

"Have you complained to the manager?"

"I'd look like an old fool, complaining to him. Roy's got him buffaloed. 'Why, Mrs. Jannifer, why would Roy do a thing like that?' "

This old woman should have been on the stage! Nate would know who the manager was if he ever heard him speak.

She was sufficently rested to resume walking.

"I guess I couldn't blame him for not believing me, when I don't think my own son does."

"Doesn't this pounding on the pipes or stomping on the floor ever happen when your son is visiting you?" he asked suddenly suspicious.

"*He* knows when Jack is visiting me, the devil."

"Then your son never has heard this, the pounding on the pipes or the stomping?"

"You don't believe me either."

"Now, I didn't say that. It just strikes me as a coincidence. That's all."

"It's no coincidence. When he creates a ruckus, it's usually about six in the morning. And my son isn't visiting me at six in the morning."

"Of course not. But you say it's not always at six in the morning?"

"Not always. But my son's a very busy man. And he lives in the suburbs. It's not easy for him to come in to see me, so he's not what you'd call a frequent visitor." A moment later she said: "I'm keeping you from your job. I'll be all right now. It was very nice of you."

"I'd feel better if I can see you all the way home."

"It's really not necessary."

She wasn't persistent and he continued to walk with her.

It was his intention simply to escort her to the entrance of the building, but she had left a small bag of groceries with the doorman and Nate took it himself.

"Not feeling well, Mrs. Jannifer?" the doorman asked.

"I've had one of my spells, Henry."

Her apartment was on the eighth floor. It was an efficiency and he didn't have to ask where to put the groceries. There was a small shelf opposite the refrigerator. The space was too small to accommodate a table.

The smallness of the apartment and the inadequacy of the kitchenette surprised him. He had thought her able to afford something more spacious. But except for that, everything was as nice as he thought it would be. He knew it had been no small project to decide where every picture should be hung, whether the settee should be one place and not another. He looked looked around him admiringly. His lone criticism was that she had more plants than so small an apartment could accommodate.

"You sure have this place looking nice, ma'am."

"You think so?" She had dropped into the first chair she came to, as though she couldn't have gone another step.

"I do. Can I get you something? A glass of water?"

"You can get me a drink. A little whiskey and water." She pointed towards the kitchenette. "And get yourself something."

"Thank you, but during working hours I'm supposed to stick to espresso."

"And you stick to it?"

"I'm a good cop." He replaced the ice tray, and the door of the old model refrigerator closed with a surprising slam. "Sorry," he said.

He gave her the drink. "Are you sure you won't have anything?" she asked.

He was saying that he wouldn't have anything, that he had better return to The Rook, when the noise from above came. It was a regular pounding, a heavy foot coming down again and again.

"Well, that's no ninety-year-old woman," said Nate.

"Now do you believe me?"

"I believe you."

"One word from you—the very sight of you—and he'd never do it again."

Roy, he now knew, was a white man.

"I'll speak to him," he said. "But you come up with me. I'll just threaten him," he assured her. "I won't disturb a hair on that man's head."

"Do you think . . ."

"I want you to come with me."

They took the elevator. Even one flight of stairs was too much for her.

She waited six or seven feet away as he stood in front of 9H and listened. The name in the slot was *M. Byrnes. Mrs. Byrnes*, he remembered. A radio was playing softly. The stamping had ceased. He could hit the door hard enough to splinter it, but he restrained himself. He hit it twice, hard enough to let the man know he could break it down if he wanted to.

"Roy, you hear me?"

Except for the radio, there was no sound.

"There's something I want you to know, Roy. You stop this foolish business, you hear me? You stop annoying my mother, or I'll make you sorry you ever started this foolishness. You hear me?"

Only the faint sounds of the radio came from 9H. Nate gave the door a final pound and, careful not to look at her, he walked rapidly past Mrs. Jannifer. He jabbed the elevator button for her, but he himslf used the fire tower.

Interruption in August

• Thomas A. West, Jr.

Ned Crankshaw heaved himself up to a sitting position on his narrow cot. He was more depressed than usual on this particular morning. All it ever takes, he thought, is one boy out of twelve or twenty or a hundred . . . to ruin a man's summer.

He rubbed his eyes awake, then let them gently close until the lids joined, suddenly stuck, as if their stubby white lashes were small magnets. His body relaxed. A sinus pain lanced its point deep alongside the socket of his right eye. Barely frowning with his albino brows, Ned directed the aching sensation away. In essence, he told it to smother itself in the endless maze of his brain.

I am a pure snowbank, he thought, feelingless, cool, exquisitely formed. But at this last word he had to smile. Is there a drift so pure and exquisite that looms so large and weighs a thousand pounds?

It was of course an exaggeration which Ned's inner being constantly launched at him. The last scales he had shambled up onto read 332. He smiled again, remembering the doctor's thin-ice patience as he kept shoving steel weights to the other end of the bar.

Perilously close to sleep, he was, and he caught himself from falling backward onto the bed. He had to dress himself in the semi-darkness of the dawn. At all times there must be clothes surrounding his body, every moment of the day, at least, until the deliverance of night. Toward early morning his eyes stared at the cabin roof, and he waited, mind working slowly, heavily, gathering speed, then rapidly building dreams of wealth, miraculous cure: glandular balance restored, physique young, muscular—until fantasies of handsome, bold women opened their doors to him.

Above all, he must not sleep late, for then the campers would see him, and they would talk about him and nudge each other, laughing as he walked by them.

One boy more than all the rest.

He removed his pajamas as quietly as he could, but there were enormous pungs, spraining sounds squeezed from the springs beneath the mattress. For an instant he allowed a cooling window breeze to bathe his nakedness. A gust of it seemed to snarl through the screen like a gigantic mosquito gone berserk, and at this second there was a click and a simultaneous flash, followed by laughter.

Ned grew hot. He prickled at the skin, and breathed hard as he methodically worked his way into his clothes.

"Who did it?" he asked the cabin. "Who?"

Silence enlarged itself like a balloon, but was burst by another series of raucous laughter.

Crankshaw had already made up his mind, and he moved to the bedside of Tommy Rinehart.

"All right, son. Let me have the camera."

It was light enough for Ned to see the child's face, which had the exact same expression as it had when he

was caught removing the intestine from a live leopard frog. Tommy's eyes were bulging, and there was a grin somehow jamming his mouth all wrong, as if he had wires yanked taut at the edges of his lips. Yellowed teeth were bared as he slowly handed his camera to the counselor. Ned opened it, removed the film, letting it play out on its spool; it shined black and purple in the glint of sun.

"You'll pay for that," Tommy said, his smile vanished, his eyes squinted almost shut.

"I won't lecture you, Tom. But you might try to think how I felt when you snapped that picture of me."

There was no reply.

"How would you feel if I did something like that to you?"

"Fine, sir, just *fine*."

Ned began to walk away, his head ponderously shaking the sadness and bewilderment off.

"My camera! You give me my camera!" Tommy shouted.

The counselor stopped, turned, and spoke. "You can have it back. I'll just hold on to it for a while, son, until I get some sort of apology from you."

"It's *my* camera. My *father* gave it to me. *Brand new*."

"That makes no difference."

"I'll tell him! I'll tell him!"

"I couldn't care less, son."

"Don't you call me that. I'm not your son. You're too fat to have a son."

Ned was suddenly faint. The boy's final words plunged into his already-retreating mind, and he left the cabin, then. He heard the campers' voices raised in excited pitch. Tommy Rinehart's was foremost. It shouted, "I'll get him, I'll get him for that."

As he glanced ruefully back over his shoulder, he thought he saw or sensed violent activity at his corner of the cabin; so he about-faced and returned in time to see Tommy and three of his friends smashing Ned's flashlight, his own camera, a clock, and a glass-framed picture of his mother and father.

They stopped.

Tommy stood defiantly facing the counselor as the others scampered to their bunks, and waited there, swallowing and looking at their feet.

Ned let Tommy's camera fall to the floor. His boot crushed it. He reached out, grabbed the boy by the back of the neck, and then dragged him screaming, kicking, biting, scratching—all the way to the lodge on the hill where they both roused the director.

II

It took a while for Mr. Rinehart to calm them down. In his bathrobe at his office desk he heard the counselor out. Then he listened to Tommy. When the boy was through ranting, every one of his words edged with spittle, Mr. Rinehart spoke slowly and deliberately.

"I take this—this ridiculous camera-smashing as the act of children, and, Mr. Crankshaw—"

"May I speak to you *alone*, sir?"

"Please do not interrupt, Mr. Crankshaw, I personally feel there is less excuse for your action than for Tommy's. You are a grown man with many years' experience—perhaps too many? You are a teacher as well as a counselor. What I'm saying, Crankshaw, is this: control. Control is uppermost, should be uppermost in the minds and in the hearts of every staff member. My cadre here at Camp Evergreen have never given in to exchanging tantrums with children. Never." He paused.

"Boys will be boys, Mr. Crankshaw. Tommy's snapping that picture of you was not a crime."

"*Sir.* Are you so insensitive, are you so—"

"Please, Mr. Crankshaw. I have not given equal time to the boy."

"Equal time? Even if Tommy is your son gives you no right to treat us as two equal persons, Mr. Rinehart, as if we were in fact two errant campers—"

Rinehart snorted and began pacing the room, puffing furiously on a cigaret. "Yes, *equal.* Are you a victim of prejudice, sir, because this boy *is* my son? I'll tolerate no lack of professional attitude in my camp!"

"*Professional? Attitude?*"

Ned looked around him. His eyes fell on Tommy's, and there was a second of knowledge which struck the counselor with the force of the hatred which was in back of it: Tommy's eyes said, "I am going to kill you."

"You heard me, Crankshaw! Now let's not have this meeting degenerate into a verbal brawl. I won't have it. Now, Tommy?"

"Yes, sir?" Tommy stood at attention.

"You do understand, naturally, that what you did was wrong, damaging your counselor's possessions."

"Yes, sir."

"Good. Now if this happens a second time, I will have to punish you."

"Yes, sir."

"You may go, Tommy."

The boy nodded, yes-sirred again, and sauntered out of the office.

"Just one thing, Mr. Rinehart," Ned found himself saying. "Your son needs help. He needs professional guidance."

"You may leave too, Mr. Crankshaw. After all, it is time to start the day. I haven't even dressed, let alone shaved, and there's so much to be done, so much—"

"Mr. Rinehart, why are we all so blind to the deep trouble living inside those closest to us? Sir, I—"

"*There is nothing wrong with Tommy.*"

Ned felt pressure rise in him like a great caldron. He was suddenly hot, then cold as if he had plunged his whole body into a boiling vat and then leapt out into the snow. He saw the destroyed photograph of his parents. He remembered the days and days of swallowing remarks from Tommy Rinehart. He saw in the eye of his brain those crystal images of Tommy . . .

"By God you'd better at least listen to my side, Rinehart. I'm an outraged man in case you've failed to recognize the fact. I could work myself up into another case of coronary thanks to you and that little tortured son you just let go undisciplined. Tommy loves to operate on animals, did you know that, sir?"

"Stop—please—"

"Living, writhing, struggling animals."

"Then if he is sick, why in hell did you smash his camera? If he is so sick, why did you respond to his anger by violently dragging him up here in front of the entire camp? Apparently you treat him as you would any other child; yet you say that he is sick."

"He needs *control*, sir. And he needs his home, his mother, and he needs—"

"I am well aware of what that boy needs. I am his father. Mr. Crankshaw, I realize Tommy is different. He has a terrible temper—as do you, apparently. As for his mother, she frankly does not know how to handle

him any more than you do. In fact, sir, in utmost confidence she cannot stand to be with him more than two weeks. The boy has to learn, sir. He has to be thrown in with boys his own age so they will indirectly teach him—"

"Mr. Rinehart, your son is teaching *them*."

The director sighed impatiently.

"Leave this office, sir. I don't like what you are implying."

Ned swallowed a building anger and swore under his breath as he labored down the hill to supervise the children.

III

The day was going to be brutally hot, at least to Ned, who felt more than ever the ponderous luggage of his flesh whenever the furious sun followed him. It added to the sludge in his veins and arteries. He thought, if ever he were gunned down at noon on a brassy day similar to this one, what oozed out of him would not be blood, but lava.

On the path to the rifle range a quarter-mile distant from the cabin, he amused himself with silent conversations. There was a friend in him called Cassius, one who cursed his Stoicism, his readings of Zeno and Aurelius; who cursed his fat, who reminded him of all the trouble there was in the world.

"Why don't you quit this hole?" Cassius snarled.

"I may yet. If it weren't for the money—"

"Hell, money, money, money—you are a slave to the lack of it. Before it's too late, Crankshaw, *do something with yourself.*"

"What?"

"Hell, how should I know. That's *your* department. Hey—why don't you start your new life by punching Tommy Rinehart's rotten little face in?"

"All right, Cassius. That's enough."

"And then follow up with a right hook to the director's gut, and—"

"Shut the devil up, friend."

Ned b a n i s h e d him as he approached the range, where the boys from his cabin were in line. Of all mornings, he thought, the morning of mornings to instruct Tommy Rinehart and Company at riflery.

"Good morning, gentlemen."

Silence came from them, though Benny McCormick smiled bravely, and looked as if he wanted to return the greeting. He saw the withering stare from Tommy, however, and thus shamed, he looked away from Ned.

There was no use in pursuing the matter, Ned believed. He unlocked the gunroom and began issuing rifles and ammunition. Within ten minutes the targets were clipped to parallel wires fifty feet downrange, strung along in front of a barricade of sand and logs. An uneasy quiet settled on the platform where a dozen campers lay on mattresses, awaiting the order to load.

Ned gave the command. He added "—and lock," and twelve bolts clacked forward and down in an oiled-steeled interruption in August.

"Safeties off. Fire when you are ready."

The first volley was ragged. Sharp reports snapped the day, and Ned settled down for three hours of giving commands, offering advice, penciling scores—but all at once he saw dirt fly in front of two positions on the right. To the left, bullets cried off the stone wall in fearful agony, while on center line, the boys deli-

berately aimed at and occasionally hit the clothespins attached to the targets.

"Cease fire!" Ned shouted hoarsely. Yet with the exception of Benny McCormick, the campers continued shooting, now into the woods, now at rocks, now at the ground, until their ammunition was expended.

Ned was on his feet, bewildered, perspiring freely, and his anger mounted in him like a great ocean turbulence. Yet he could not speak for the longest stretch of moments. When his voice did emerge, it was cracked, and he swallowed and coughed once to give it strength. His hands were trembling with agitation.

"What is the meaning of this?" he said.

There was no sound, except a cicada's monotone and a rasping crow call from far away.

"I asked you boys for an explanation, and by God I'll have one even if we have to spend all day here."

He waited, standing, and the minutes inched along, wounded and with silent pain. He sat back down, leaned forward, placed his elbows on the table in front of him, and he rubbed his eyes which suddenly itched in their puffy inflamed sockets.

The campers stared ahead until by two's and three's they leaned their faces on their rifles or on the mattresses, as if they would sleep there.

Cassius was quiet. He had at the outset shrunk back, afraid, leaving Ned to fight the mutiny by himself.

Ned tried picturing his apartment —the hundreds of hard-cover volumes lining a whole wall from top to bottom, and not a one of them having prepared him for this. Nor had all the years of his experience dealing with youth prepared him.

He grew frightened.

A giant knot grew in his stomach, moving upward, opening and fisting like an enormous hand. Fingers urgently poked and pried and wrenched in him, while his mind waited.

Where was Cassius?

Where were the Stoics, now?

"I'm waiting," he said obviously, and one of the boys laughed a nervous, girlish laugh. And then the others followed suit, laughing, all laughing, some of them—one in particular, laughing uncontrollably.

"Stop it! Stop it this instant!" Ned raved at them, but he soon realized it was useless. He saw, too, that his control was almost gone.

"Hey, Mr. Fatman, how do you like our joke?"

Tommy's remark had a devastating effect on his comrades. They hooted and some held their stomachs as their laughter cramped them, and others wiped away tears.

This was better, Ned thought. The silence was ruinous, but he had always known how to handle a smart remark.

"Come here, Tom."

The boys calmed down and waited.

"Sir?"

"I said come here."

"What're you gonna do, sir, belch me to death?"

There was the laughter again, but it did not have the staying power as before.

"If you don't come here, Tom, I guess I'll have to go to you."

Tom grudgingly unslung his rifle, flopped it on the mat, got up and wandered over to the counselor.

"Well?"

"You realize what you did, Tom Rinehart? I'll withdraw the question and make a statement. You know damn well what you did. Your actions could have killed somebody down

here. For all you know there was a camper in the woods where your bullets went. You never thought of that angle, did you? In your vengeance, in your sick vengeance, you never gave one single thought to any other human being. I know your father won't discipline you, Tom. But by the good Lord, *I will.*"

When he lunged for the boy he was caught off balance, and his chest fell onto the table which gave immediately, and he was crashing to the floor before he was aware of a bursting sensation at his heart. He heard laughter, but it meant little to him then as he gasped like a huge fish washed ashore.

"Look! He's turning *purple,*" cried one.

Benny McCormick rushed to the counselor, shoving Tom out of the way and crying over and over, "You fools! Fools! See what you've done! Look at what you've done!"

Several campers stepped away, bewildered, then afraid.

"*He's* all right," Tom said. "No need to worry about *him.*"

Benny began to sob and wring his hands.

"Shut up you little chicken. Shut up before I belt you—"

"Hey, Tom, we better get Doc Holden."

"Forget it, forget it, see? The old whale just had too much exercise—right, Fatman? Right?"

Benny ran for the exit but Tom was on him, swarming over him and flailing with his fists and kicking with intensity until Benny lay doubled over on the cement platform, the wind temporarily gone, while Tom's right foot shot out at least a dozen times, aimed at Benny's head.

No one moved to stop him.

Finally he finished, panting, his eyes extremely wide, senses reeling.

"Anyone else want to try?" he asked.

The campers stood, rooted.

"Let's shoot!" Tom said. "Come on, we've got the whole world, the whole place to ourselves. Let's shoot at tin cans—hey! Let's go on a hunting party in the woods up on Gerald's Hill. Who's with me?"

They hung back. Their eyes studied him with a new wonderment. Then a boy named Jerry Straus said, "I didn't—I mean, Tom, I never thought you'd go this far. I thought we were going to have a joke, like you said, and that was it, you know?"

The others nodded agreement.

Ned's chest worked with horrible rhythms now. He imagined that lava was pouring from the slack crater of his mouth, but he saw no reddening of the floor. A mosquito whined to a settling on his left hand which he could see through a watery gauze that grew clearer until he realized the outline of a group of sneakered feet. Because of a ringing vacuum in his mind, he heard nothing. He imagined pain, but there was none. He tried to move, but there was no commanding an arm or a leg, or even the hand where the insect filled himself with nourishment.

"*You coming or not?*" Rinehart shouted at them and listened to McCormick crying softly, almost whimpering, and he heard Fatman's enormous breaths gulping and wheezing, but there were no other sounds.

He filled his pockets with twenty-two bullets from the gunroom, snatched a rifle from one of the mats, and began to run toward Gerald's Hill.

IV

The voices Ned heard were alien to him, and his mind carefully sorted memories until it grew aware of a hospital room, of machines and bottles he knew too well, and of a nurse.

"Hello? Awake, are you?"

"In . . . a manner . . . of speaking."

But why was it so damned hard to breathe? The last attack had pressed down on his chest like a block of iron; but this, this was almost intolerable.

"How long—?" Ned asked.

"Not long enough, Mr. Crankshaw. The two days you've been here—one under heavy sedation—are just not nearly enough. In fact you might well spend the rest of the summer with us, I fear."

"God, no. I can't—afford—"

"Of course you can't. Now please, sir, keep still and I'll go fetch Doc York."

With a name like that, Ned thought —don't bother—and then he nearly panicked as he remembered the rifle range. "The Rinehart boy," he said to the ceiling. He tried to raise himself but he collapsed. Instead of perspiring, Ned grew cold and clammy.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Crankshaw. How do you feel?" York, a gliding, chestless man whose legs and arms seemed overly long, eased to the edge of the bed and through green eyes observed his patient.

"Not good—here—all crushed—"

"That was a close call, Mr. Crankshaw. I understand from Mr. Rinehart that you have been witness to previous coronaries? Yes? Just nod or shake your head. You need not waste good air."

Crankshaw nooded.

"Point one, Mr. Crankshaw: you need rest; two, the most rigorous diet I can safely prescribe; three—a mindless job with no responsibilities. Oh, you needn't look so blasted upset; I merely stated what you should have, how you should behave, not what you'll do. Heart patients are a peculiar breed, Mr. Crankshaw. They are most determined to die, and they pursue this objective with every final ounce of vigor.

"Now before I attend to more responsible clientele, here is an envelope from Mr. Rinehart, containing your paycheck and probably a get-well-quick note. I assured him, however, that you would not be allowed by this hospital to return to work.

"Good-day. Until the 'morrow, as they say in Haiku—and damn it, *follow the nurse's orders!*"

Ned tried to smile, and fumbled the letter out.

Dear Mr. Crankshaw,

Allow me to express a portion of my grief that you are so ill. I had no idea, but then, few people do—few are capable of identifying with others' problems, apparently.

Enclosed is a check for the entire camp season. It is admittedly a small amount, but right now I am certain you need all you can get for the hospital expenses. I assume you are properly insured? If there is anyone you wish me to contact in this respect, do let me know.

As for my son.

I was told that he and others directed a "rebellion" of sorts at the range, and that this is why you tried to strike him, and in so doing, narrowly missed his head.

Rest assured, Mr. Crankshaw, I will not say a word of this to whatever future employer you might have, should he ask me for a recommendation. Nor will I report the incident to your present school, where you

teach. I take it for granted that you will benefit from this experience, and never again attempt to raise a hand in anger against a mere child.

Hoping your recovery is quick and merciful, I remain,

Sincerely,
Albert T. Rinehart
Director

Ned allowed the letter to slip through his fingers. A soft breeze from the open window brushed it onto the floor, where it scraped to a corner like a dead leaf.

Listening to distant thunder shudder the wooded hills, Ned closed his eyes and dreamed of home.

The Pianists

• **Richard Loomis**

The fingers drop their melody like crystal:

Sounds of shining
That make us see that beauty
Is in the run of things.

The startling juxtapositions
That scatter waves to sparkles
And gather particles to summer pools
Clarify the air with speed.

What poise does this?
What force?
What is the spring of this thousand-figured progression?

It is joy, I suppose.
Joy is helpless control:
A child at breast,
Lover in arms,
Mother sewing in sunlight by a half-curtained

Window.

The Manipulators

• Gerald W. Sadenwater

Sebastien Barreau sat in a private room on the second floor of The Fort, in conference with his trusted friends. In those days he was still a most influential man in the Objibway Valley, although his formerly unchallenged position as leading citizen had already begun to deteriorate. The action taken three months before by the newly created Board of Supervisors, over his objections even though he was chairman, represented a case in point. And it galled. It galled.

The flickering light of the candles formed huge shadows on the chinked walls; their acrid effluvium added to the discomfort of the men assembled in the hot, airless room. The closed door and the two shuttered windows protected not only against the admittedly remote possibility of a prying eye or ear but also from the swarms of mosquitoes and other insects which rose from the swamplands and marshes on warm spring nights to plague the villages. Adam, Barreau's boy of all work, stood sentinel outside the closed door.

Barreau looked from one to another of the trusted circle with his shrewd eyes. "Well, Zhentlemen. What do you think?"

Sebastien fished a dazzling white handkerchief from his waistcoat and wiped his brow. He shoved the letter from the state commissioner of lands, which he had just read aloud, across the table to Calvin Beardsley, who also could read.

Beardsley, the only man in the valley, except George Van Oyer, who dared to address him as Sebastien, casually read the letter, then returned it. Leaning back in his chair, he studied Barreau's red, perspiring face in his cool, appraising manner.

"What do you have in mind, Sebastien?"

Barreau's fat stumpy fingers played with a pen he had picked up from the table, twirling it round and round. He raised his eyes without lifting his head. The lawyer's eternal calm, even in tight situations, even in this atrocious heat, irritated him. It always did. He choked back a peevish remark and said, in a carefully restrained voice: "I don' know, Calvin. I don' know." He lifted an admonishing forefinger. "But we mus' do something!"

Obie Smith stirred on his stool. He scratched his bald head with a grubby finger and peered at Sebastien with his red-rimmed, winkerless eyes. "It's kind of late, Mr. Barreau. The stakes are already in place."

Obie Smith was, like Adam, in Barreau's employ, so to speak, and was, again like Adam, a man of many hats, now serving as bartender or waiter or even as chef in the tavern, now as traveling companion and Indian interpreter to his chief, or perhaps as tender of Barreau's dwindling traplines. But Sebastien had little regard for his mental processes. His impatient eyes flicked past him and settled on Semi Gibbs, the massive redhead Irish blacksmith.

Gibbs, a cheerful, ruddy giant, had married his benefactor's light-heart-

ed, hot-blooded daughter, Lucie, and had managed, Barreau was thinking, to calm her down with three children in three years.

"The cour'ouse mus' be built 'ere, not across the rivaire in the bastard village of that lan'-grabbing New Yorker, Zheorzhe Van Oyer!"

His son-in-law was the one to whom Sebastien turned for new ideas, for daring solutions to vexing problems and doubtful situations, but from the noncommittal, affable smile on Semi's face it was clear that he was not yet ready to offer any of his oblique advice. Barreau turned back to Beardsley. With a mirthless smile he said: "I should 'ave appointed you the chairman of the site committee, Calvin, instead of Zheorzhe. That was a bad mistake."

Beardsley nodded. He looked down and became most interested in the cuffs of his gray frock coat, which he had declined to shed despite the heat.

Barreau, taking his silence for agreement, and a reproof the lawyer was too courteous to voice, shrugged his shoulders and threw up his hands. "'But I never thought they would refuse my offer of free lan' over 'ere."

Beardsely looked up. "That only gave Van Oyer the idea of donating some of his own land."

Obie Smith got up from his stool, passed around the table behind Barreau, and spat into the dead ashes of the fireplace.

"It's on that high ground back of the bayou."

Obie spoke with authority in the matter of location, for Sebastien had thought it expedient, regardless of his disappointment and opposition, to offer Obie's assistance in plotting the proposed site, because of his alleged background in surveying.

"Zhentlemen, this Mazhor 'olcomb, the commissioner, comes next Wednesday. We have a week to do something." Barreau snatched up the pen again, threw it down, shifted impatiently in his chair, turned his scowling face to Semi Gibbs once more. "Sam?"

Gibbs sat quietly, a new light, a wily glint in his eyes. He looked sideways at his father-in-law.

"This Major Holcomb, Mr. Barreau." He called him Grandpa at home, but this was hardly suitable in public. "Does he know this country?"

"'ow do you mean, Sam?"

"I mean, has he ever visited the valley? Does he know Van Oyer? Things like that."

Barreau slowly shook his head. "No . . . I don' know . . . I think 'e is new in Michigan. Another grasping New Yorker, I 'ear."

Gibbs hitched forward in his chair. "Does George know that Holcomb is coming?"

"'e knows the commissioner 'as to approve the site. But 'e knows nothing of this letter."

"Has Van Oyer had any correspondence with Holcomb?"

"Not unless 'e 'as done so behin' my back. I 'ave 'andled the correspondence myself." Barreau frowned. The suspicion had never entered his mind. The thought offended him.

"Now. . . ." Semi Gibbs paused pointedly. His blue eyes narrowed as he watched the expression on Sebastien Barreau's face change again to one of impatience. He smiled carefully. "Does Major Holcomb know the exact site proposed by Van Oyer?"

Barreau jumped up excitedly, tipping backward the chair in which he had been sitting. "Ah," he breathed, ignoring the fallen chair. "Yes." For a full minute sunk in thought, he

stood with his pudgy white fingers on the table, leaning on them, breathing rapidly and rather heavily. At last he smiled gratefully at Gibbs, then turned to Tom Sharp, a tall gangling unshaven man who sat indolently on a stool between Semi Gibbs and himself, but back a little from the table, as Obie did. "Call Adam, Tom. We will make our plans."

Sullenly, but with alacrity, Tom Sharp untangled his long lower limbs from the legs of the stool and slouched to the door. Obie Smith hastened to right the prostrate chair. Gibbs and Barreau settled back in their chairs, pleased with themselves. Calvin Beardsley sat glumly in his chair, drumming his dry fingers on the table, but he kept silent. He owed a great deal to Sebastien, who had brought him to the valley directly from an eastern university and had subsidized his law practice until it had, recently, through the gradual increase in population, attained a self-supporting level.

On the day before Major Holcomb was expected, Calvin Beardsley, dressed in his pearl-gray frock coat and white broad-brimmed hat and accompanied by the boy, Adam, set out from Fort Objibway at dawn. Beardsley was on his own black gelding, Miracle, and Adam rode a pony from Barreau's stable. A day's provision of fried bacon and corn bread was in Beardsley's saddlebags.

They crossed the river on Barreau's ferry and headed south-by-east along what at this end was known as the Detroit Trail and at the other end was called the Objibway Trail, crossing the marshy bayou on the causeway Sebastien Barreau had built twenty years before, in 1818, soon after arriving on the Objibway as the first permanent settler.

It was the latter part of May; the unseasonable heat had departed, but the mosquitoes that had exploded into existence, impelled by its inviting warmth, abounded. They rose from the dark, damp forest by the myriads to torment the travelers. It will be better, Beardsley mused, later on, when we reach higher, drier ground and the sun drives the little demons to cover. A flock of jays, brilliant patches of blue and white and gray flashing against the smoky green of the new-budded forest, crossed and recrossed the path in their headlong, careening, screaming flights through the treetops, desecrating the stillness.

The old Indian trail had been widened by use as a man is broadened by experience, so that they could have ridden abreast, but Beardsley rode ahead and Adam behind, like a knight of old and his squire.

Calvin Beardsley was by his own admission like a man out of context in the crude life of the frontier. Captured by Sebastien Barreau's enthusiasm and promises of riches and empire, ignorant of the primitiveness Barreau had skillfully withheld, he had left the amenities, the social and physical comforts of New England. Now he had to deal with blackguards like Tom Sharp, with practical visionaries, pious frauds like Barreau, illiterate, uncouth clowns like Obie Smith, with half-wild half-breeds like Adam.

The boy trailed along behind him, riding bareback chanting a barbaric, unmelodic strain that did nothing at all to allay Beardsley's fear—not of Adam, but of the natives in general—a fear unreasoning and unconquerable, although Beardsley's own experience had shown him that those

who lived in or passed through the valley were for the most part, though ignorant, shiftless, and not very clean, peaceable and friendly. Official tradition said that Adam was a white child of unknown parentage who had been stolen by savages as an infant and had lived among them for years until Barreau rescued him from barbarity and re-introduced him into civilization. Backstairs gossip on the other hand had it that he was Sebastien's own son, by a squaw before his French wife finally joined him in the wilderness, a son unacknowledged but nurtured. To determine the truth of the matter seemed to Calvin Beardsley both difficult and unprofitable.

At the point where the trail met the Lewis, a wandering tributary of the Objibway, Calvin Beardsley stopped. Adam pulled up beside him. Here it was also that the trail, coming from the south, branched off toward George Van Oyer's upstart village. Beardsley, staring pensively down at the forking trail, noted that the offshoot looked more traveled than the original road back to Barreau's ferry and Fort Objibway.

Beardsley unobtrusively studied the boy, his long black hair, the high cheekbones, the way he had of looking as if into a great distance. His habitual silence, which seemed to lend plausibility, if it were not a learned trait, to his hypothetical savage blood, suited Beardsley's mood perfectly.

They rode on. The trail skirted the river for a mile upstream to the fording place, then forsook the stream on the other side, and struck out cross-country again. Adam fell back and took up his low unearthly chant. Since their mission was to intercept Major Holcomb's party, there was no need for haste. They established an unhurried but steady pace. The day grew warmer as it waxed. The chiff-chiff of the horses' hooves on the resilient earth fragmented minutely the hours and the miles. Beardsley dozed in the saddle.

At noon they reached the Brush, another branch of the Objibway, three miles below Brushford. Beardsley turned off into a little clearing, once the much-used overnight camp of travelers, now fallen into disuse since the building of the tavern at the ford. They dismounted and led their mounts down to the oak-fringed river. There was a satisfaction, a pleasure in watching the animals thrust their muzzles deep into the water, roiling its placid surface and muddying its clarity with their stamping forefeet.

They led the horses back into the meadow. Adam loosened the cinch and removed the saddle and saddlebags from Miracle's broad back. Then they turned the animals loose to graze, while they ate their own meal of cold bacon and buttered corn bread.

They sat on the ground in the lush green meadow grass of spring, beneath a lone tree near the circle of old ashes from long-dead fires. The tree was not yet leaved out fully, but the light, delicately traced shade was welcome after the long ride in the morning sun.

When they had finished eating, Beardsley leaned back against his saddle, wishing he had brought his pipe and tobacco. Adam stretched out on the ground.

"We'll wait here for Major Holcomb, Adam. He has to pass this way."

The boy grunted and turned over on his side. He was soon asleep.

An hour later Beardsley's attentive ear detected the thud of approaching hooves. He started up and poked the slumbering Adam.

They stood at the side of the trail, waiting.

Around the bend from the river two men rode into view. Major Holcomb—it was surely he—attired as he was in a military uniform of some sort—led the way on a splendid white horse. His man, nondescript, shadowed, followed like a dog at its master's heels. They reined in at Beardsley's signal.

"Major Holcomb?"

"Yes."

The man said no more. Leaning on the pommel of his saddle, staring down inquiringly, superciliously at Beardsley, he exuded confidence, assurance.

Beardsley inspected the thick, well-manicured mustaches, looked up into the dark penetrating, dispassionate eyes, and conceived an instant dislike for Holcomb. Beneath the image of unruffled calm that Barreau admired in Beardsley was a man uncertain and vacillating, who had gained his reputation for wisdom and sagacity through hesitation and equivocation, a man, therefore, who was possessed of an unreasoning aversion for persons of directness and decision. He smiled and extended his hand upward.

"Calvin Beardsley, Sebastien Barreau's attorney. Mr. Barreau asked me to ride out and accompany you into Fort Objibway."

Major Holcomb reached down and grasped his hand. A broad, artless smile overspread and replaced his rather dour expression.

"Thank you, Mr. Beardsley. This is highly thoughtful of Mr. Barreau."

He was obviously pleased, flattered by this convenient interpretation of Sebastien's motive. Beardsley became a bit more easy in his mind. What he had thought was assurance now appeared to be only conceit, and what he had taken for discernment, a mere physical quality of the eyes, perhaps reinforced by that conceit. Sebastien's crude manipulating was in no great danger from this pompous individual.

"I hope your journey has been easy and pleasant."

Major Holcomb drew himself up in the saddle and touched the small of his back. "Travel in these times is never easy, Mr. Beardsley," he said sententiously. "But it has been uneventful. We met a small band of red men but they passed on quietly, scarcely took notice of us."

"You'll find that the savages in these parts are quite civilized, mostly harmless and tractable."

"Yes, of course." Holcomb glanced away over the head of Beardsley and surveyed the disused campsite. "Will we pass the night here?"

Beardsley waved away a large fly that was buzzing about his head. "If you are agreeable, we will push on. We can reach Fort Objibway before nightfall. You can have a good night's sleep in a comfortable bed at the Fort, make your inspection in the morning, and, if you wish, be on your way back to Detroit before noon."

Major Holcomb agreed, and after a short rest they set out for Fort Objibway.

That night, soon after Adam had announced the arrival of Major Holcomb, Obie Smith and Tom Sharp, while Sebastien Barreau went downstairs to greet his guest, soundlessly descended a back stairway, crossed

the yard past the kitchen and the stables, and left by the back gate.

It was the dark of the moon but the glow of the lights from the inn lighted their way until they left the lee of the rear stockade wall and slipped into the trees that bordered the river. Obie led the way, for he was the vaunted woodsman and Indian scout, and Tom Sharp laid no claim to being more than an indolent, incompetent farmer and unscrupulous rascal. They groped and stumbled and slid down the steep slope to the bank, where they stood listening to the ripple and wash of the water.

Across the river, twenty yards downstream, the light in the ferryman's hut gleamed solitarily. The ferryman was a Barreau man—and besides no suspicion would be aroused since Obie regularly used the ferry in his nocturnal visits to the Widow Bartlett upriver in Salina—but Sebastien had instructed them to use the canoe. The shed that Barreau utilized as a boathouse was a few feet to the left, its tiny bulk more sensed than perceived in the murky darkness.

The two scamps conversed in low tones as they crept along the bank toward the shed.

Obie was abristle with efficiency. He opened the creaking door of the shed, groped his way inside, lifted the far end of the canoe, whispered to Sharp: "You take that end. Be sure to raise it clear." They carried it the few feet to the bank. It slid gently and smoothly into the water. Obie held the canoe. Tom Sharp placed one long leg in the bottom of the craft, then awkwardly pulled the other in after him. He sank to his knees and crawled to the bow. Obie pushed off with his right foot and nimbly lofted his thickset body into the canoe. With swift, sure strokes he paddled off, keeping the nose of the canoe pointed upstream to compensate for the current.

The night was cool and hushed, save for the steady hum of the doings in the taproom at The Fort. The stars were dimmed by a thin overcast. From far downriver the high rasping cry of a nighthawk was heard.

Obie was in good spirits. This was their sort of venture. They were Barreau's perpetrators of knavery. Anything even slightly malodorous fell to their lot.

The opposite bank at this point on the river was equally as high and steep as the one they had quitted. It lay shrouded in the heavy darkness. Only the light in the ferryman's hut enabled Obie to judge distances and set a course. Tom knelt in the bow, tense, hands clenching the gunwales, peering forward into the night.

"Goddam it, Obie," he whispered, his surprisingly soft voice tight with apprehension. "I can't see a damn thing!"

Obie had no affinity with fear. He calmly dipped his paddle on alternate sides of the canoe. "We'll be there in a minute."

Then, with three or four strong rapid strokes on one side, he brought the light craft broadside to the bank. He groped for and found a bush growing out of the bank, seized it, and pulled himself out of the canoe, then held it while Tom clumsily scrambled ashore. They lifted the boat and deposited it high on the bank.

At the top of the slope they sought out the path that led from Salina downstream along the riverbank to Van Oyer's East Objibway. They stole past the ferryman's hut, past the blacksmith shop and cabin of

Semi Gibbs, discernible against the glow from The Fort, farther on, past George Van Oyer's mill, silent at this hour but seeming, by its very size, to Tom Sharp's hypersensitive imagination to breathe animosity, hatred.

Once, near a turn in the path as it followed the contours of the river, they heard hoofbeats and saw an erratic light through the trees. They faded into the bushes and crouched facing the trail. The rider passed by at a walk, carrying a pineknot torch, which burned fitfully and smokily.

"Who is it, Obie?" Sharp demanded, breathless. "Who is it? I can't see that far."

Obie peered out over the underbrush, muttering, craning his thick neck and moving his head from side to side.

"It's that bastard, Labiche, from Salina. See the sash? He thinks he's still a *voyageur*. Going home."

He settled back on his haunches, watched the scattered, bobbing rays of the receding light.

"Maybe we should've taken the other path, beyond the bayou."

Sharp was a blend of cowardice and bravado. "If we had a musket or a rifle, we could've picked him off."

"You know Sebastien don't like violence."

"I know. I was just speculating."

"You better leave the speculation to Sebastien."

With the light gone, the darkness was complete again. They continued their stealthy mission passing various scattered cabins, until they came to Van Oyer's causeway over the bayou.

At the foot of the causeway, beside the river trail, stood the inn kept by Leon Snow, George Van Oyer's brother-in-law. Snow called his establishment Trail's End, an appellation that enraged Barreau. "It's a lie!" he would fume, in wrath and contempt, pointing down at the puncheon floor of the taproom. "Everyone knows the true trail runs by 'ere! And it doesn't even end *'ere!* It goes on to Mackinaw."

Obie and Tom Sharp crept to the very edge of the low crude porch and stood in the velvety darkness peering in through the unshuttered window beside the door. Van Oyer, a huge hulk of a man, was standing in profile before the fireplace, talking, holding a mug in one hand and gesturing freely with the other, as if haranguing a group of his cronies. Obie experienced a combination of exhilaration and fear, standing there in the heart of the enemy camp, exposed to momentary discovery by the chance appearance of some night-roving East Objibwayan, looking in on Barreau's antagonist, u n s e e n, unsuspected. They stayed for some time, gazing in as if bewitched. But the spell had to be broken. They were too vulnerable. Obie finally turned away.

"Come on," he whispered.

They moved across the causeway, found the path on the other side, and followed it to the right. About two hundred yards up the path Obie stopped.

"Here it is," he said cheerfully, a chuckle of satisfaction in his voice.

Tom Sharp ranged up beside him.

Obie stepped from the path and vanished into the enveloping darkness. Sharp could hear his stumbling footsteps, his grunting, muttered curses. Finally, Obie uttered a low cry of triumph.

"I found the son-of-a-bitch, Tom. Bring the sack over here."

The dimensions and location of the building had been marked out as well as the proposed site. In the black night it took Obie more than an hour

to find the eight stakes and pull them.

They returned to the canoe along the second, the bayou trail.

At the postern gate of The Fort Obie said, "I'll get a lantern and a mallet. Sebastien wants them placed tonight."

On the following morning Sebastien Barreau and Major Holcomb sat at one end of the long trestle table at which they had partaken of a hearty breakfast and a number of judiciously plied nips.

The taproom of The Fort was a long narrow low-ceilinged room, a former barracks room, to which Barreau had added a large field-stone fireplace at one side and a little portcullissed bar at one end, between the door to the courtyard and the stairway to the upper rooms.

Sebastien had carefully avoided introducing Holcomb at the common breakfast that was served at an early hour for the convenience of departing guests.

Food and drink deepened Barreau's color and, so he thought, heightened his mental powers. Ruddy of face and neck, his mind racing, he rose and strode over to the fireplace, took his tobacco pouch from the mantel, and began to fill his pipe.

He stood with his back to the hearth, tamping the tobacco into the bowl with a blunt forefinger. From beneath lowered eyelids he observed Major Holcomb. The visitor sat at the table, amiably wiping his lips with a napkin, unaware that he was being watched. It goes well, thought Barreau. Obie Smith and Tom Sharp were stationed at the ferry crossing to intercept Van Oyer or any of his men. The site was ready. He had inspected it before the Major arose.

He took up the pipe-tongs, plucked a glowing coal from the dying fire, and applied it to his pipe. Going back to the table, he dropped the tobacco pouch on the table.

"Do you smoke, Mazhor?"

Holcomb looked up and smiled. His dark penetrating eyes burned happily. The twirled ends of his full mustaches seemed lifeless. He laid aside the napkin and began searching his pockets.

"Oh, yes. Indeed, I do. I have my pipe here somewhere."

Barreau sat down. "Yes, Mazhor. This is a fas'-growing vicinity. Already we 'ave almos' a thousan' of persons in the county. In ten years we 'ope to 'ave another thousan' more."

Sebastien paused to puff on his pipe. Major Holcomb smiled benignly without answering. He had found his pipe and was cheerfully spilling tobacco on the table as he filled it.

"An' why not?" Barreau went on. "There is fertile lan', abundant timber, a navigable rivaire, plentiful fur an' game animals." He raised his hand and flourished it in a sweeping, all-embracing arc. "Oh, yes. There is a great potential. A great potential."

When they had finished their pipes, Barreau stood up. "Well, Mazhor, shall we inspect the site?"

Holcomb rose and stood in his place at the end of the table, gazing at Sebastien with rapt attention.

Barreau, glancing quickly and covertly at Holcomb, picked up the nearly full bottle from the table. He put down an impulse to pour the Major another drink. He had wanted only to recreate the fellowship of the previous night, but after that riotous time the effect had been stronger and more rapid than he had anticipated.

"Adam!" he bellowed at the top of his voice.

Major Holcomb giggled at this. Sebastien looked sharply at Holcomb and mutely congratulated himself for his perspicacity.

Adam appeared in the open doorway to the courtyard, glided across the room, and stood before Barreau, looking down and aside in his dark, sullen secretive way. Barreau handed him the bottle and clapped a pudgy hand on his thin shoulder.

"Adam boy, put this in the Mazhor's saddlebags. It will 'elp to sustain 'im on the long zhourney 'ome," Barreau said with a carefully roguish wink at Holcomb. The Major grinned.

The lad silently accepted the bottle and disappeared up the stairway. Barreau turned back to Holcomb. "Come along, Mazhor." He took his arm.

They stepped from the dusky light of the taproom into the sunlight of a late spring morning. Blinking rapidly, Sebastien stopped, glanced swiftly to the right, down the slope to the ferry crossing, then steered Holcomb to the left, westward.

The clearing in which The Fort stood was extensive. On the edges of it the forest looked cool, dark and cool, but in the clearing the sun shone bright and unobscured. Plumes of smoke rising from the chimneys of the cabins across the trail were shadowed thinly on the ground.

Major Holcomb adjusted his military slouch hat to an even more rakish angle. His fingers strayed to the neck of his tunic, fumblingly loosened the top buttons. "Are the horses ready?"

"No, no, Mazhor 'olcomb," Sebastien remonstrated. "We 'ave no need for the 'orse. It is just over the path we 'ave to go."

The path paralleled the river on this side also and passed beside Sebastien's inn, so that the surrogate site nearly adjoined it. And here was a salient point in Barreau's concern for the location of the new building. Those persons from outlying parts of the country, when they had occasion to visit the courthouse would have to stay in town overnight, unless they were prepared to endure the risks of travel after dark. Of necessity they would stop either at The Fort or at Trail's End, the inn of Leon Snow.

Sebastien walked Holcomb around the site, pointing out to him the stake at each corner, then led him to the center of the plot. "And 'ere, Mazhor," he said, "is the 'proximate location of the building itself."

Major Holcomb looked around grandly, knowingly. "Yes. Fine," he murmured. "Very good."

"Of course," Barreau continued, "the plans are not completed, but it will be a two-story building, about an 'undred feet long and fifty feet wide."

Holcomb again mumbled vague agreement, approval. Then, pointing to a long, low-structured cabin he said, "What's 'at over there?"

"Oh, yes," Sebastien said. "That is my ol' fur shed. It is no longer used an' will be torn down. You see," (He smiled broadly and looked directly into Holcomb's softened eyes.) "I am donating this lan' for the purpose."

"Very commendable, Sebastien. Very commendable."

Sebastien turned his head away but continued to watch Holcomb out of the corner of his eye, slyly, calculatingly. "Also, I 'ave a gift for you, Mazhor." He pointed southward, beyond the fur shed. "That square over there. It is equal to this one in area. It will be valuable lan' some day." Again, he smiled broadly.

Major Holcomb smiled in return. rather vaguely. His face looked as if

it were about to fall apart. "That's very commendable."

Barreau, looking smug, triumphant, steered Holcomb back toward The Fort, saying, "I know you are impatient to begin your 'omeward zhourney, Mazhor. While you are making out your report, I will 'ave Monsieur Beardsley make over to you the deed of your lan'."

At the stockade gate Major Holcomb suddenly stopped and turned to face Barreau, breaking Sebastien's hold on his arm. The quality of hard calculation had reappeared in his penetrating blue eyes. Barreau dropped his arm, glanced at his guest, alerted by this abrupt change in manner.

"Mr. Barreau. You must know George Van Oyer. He is said to have settled in this region. I knew him slightly in New York."

Sebastien smiled his broadest. "Of course! Zheorzhe is my dear frien'. He lives across the rivaire. A mile or so downstream."

Holcomb, his hand straying to the collar of his tunic, discovered his partial disarray, quickly buttoned up, brushed imaginary lint from his breast. "Splendid. Then I'll look in on him and pay my respects on my way back to Detroit. If you will point the way, Mr. Barreau."

Sebastien kept smiling. He took the Major's arm again and urged him through the gate into the taproom. "Unfortunately, Zheorzhe 'as left yesterday morning on a zhourney to the north." He waved his hand indeterminately. "'e 'as interests up there. If I am not mistaken, 'e will be gone a week."

Inside, he spied Adam, raking the coals of the morning fire.

"Adam boy," he said, rather loudly, "secure pen an' ink for the Mazhor. Then go to Monsieur Beardsley's 'ome an' ask 'im to come here to the inn. An' then, my boy, prepare Mazhor 'olcomb's 'orse. 'e is planning to leave as soon as 'e can."

Sedation

• **James Atwell, F.S.C.**

Dream a dream
    I told myself
Of sunlit water
    washing mossy rocks:
That will be a comfort
    in the night.

But when I closed my eyes
    I saw
Gray, silent wolves
Standing
    fire-eyed
Under twisted trees
On moon-lit, crusted snow.

A God for Thelma

• Robert Joe Stout

Thelma Foxhall parked her ancient LaSalle at the foot of the slope, across from the market. An artist, a young Mexican with taut brown features and intent squirrel-like eyes, was standing on the sidewalk, legs apart, sketching with brush and ink. He held the small bottle in his left hand, like a cup of tea, and stirred his brush into it as he daubed a heavy skyline across the square of illustration board in front of him.

Why do they always come to San Angel to paint? Cuajimalpa was better, far enough from the city to have a distinctness of its own—

But she was looking at the skyline, visualizing it done with pastels. The sky first, she thought, a heavy gray; then the blue and green buildings pressed together on the hill, two-dimensional and flat. On top of the buildings, the clotheslines, the laundry on them hanging slack, tinted the same shade of dull red that emerged from the cobblestones. Perhaps, for contrast, the nose of a yellow tramcar visible at the intersection.

The scene depressed her. She lived in one of the houses; the cobblestone-tinted clothes on one line belonged to her. Without really wanting to know the time, she looked at her watch. One fifty-two. Marîa would have finished the cleaning and would be waiting for instructions about lunch. Again Thelma glanced upwards, at the concrete balconies and iron grillwork that protruded into the gray pattern.

Somehow all the houses seemed uninhabited. Before moving to San Angel, she had described the little outskirts colonia with the conventional *quaint, really Mexico, charming, refreshing.* She had believed the terms, but her belief had been an intellectual assumption based on general opinion and cliché. Like the rest of the city, San Angel was drab, dirty, and uninteresting. Briefly, she wondered how many of her convictions had similarly absurd foundations.

Marîa was sweeping the patio, a vacant expanse of rooftop decorated with two enormous cracked earthenware vases and a wooden garbage box. Seeing Thelma, the maid scuffled across the concrete, an automatic smile exposing large uneven teeth.

"*Buenos dîas, señora.*"

"*Buenos dîas, Marîa.*" Dropping her handbag on the ponderous table inside the doorway, Thelma went into the tiny parlor, set off from the entranceway by a high bookcase constructed of loose bricks and oak planking. Undoing the top buttons of her blouse, she stretched and went to the record player. She had clicked it on before she remembered that it was broken.

"Damn!"

"*Me hablô, señora?*" Marîa's round face popped through the doorway.

"No."

"*Unn,*" the maid grunted retreating. "*Creî que me hablô.*" Trying to ignore her Thelma paced disgustedly through the room, aware of the stare that followed her. "*Va-a comer, señora.*"

The lash of her anger evaporated be-

fore Thelma could whirl and expose it. *Va-a comer? Va-a comer?* The constant, unchanging intonation, the persistent blank smile followed her like a penance. "Puppet!" she had screamed once. but Marîa had not understood, and Thelma had not tried to translate. "*No le hace,*" she had apologized, and Marîa had smiled.

"*Va a com?*

"*Momentito!*"

Striding out of the parlor, Thelma recovered her handbag and began scraping through its contents. Three pesos, four, five—Checking her bitterness with clenched teeth, she turned the bag upside down on the table and sorted through the debris, sliding copper change to one side. "*De a cuânto va arroz?*" she asked sharply.

"*Va a cuartro-veinte for kilo.*"

"*Medio kilo de arroz.* Two-ten," Thelma mumbled, and a peso for bread, three-ten. Maybe a few string beans and some sowbelly—enough to make soup with. Fifty-five centavos for cigarettes . . . "*Llêvalo!*" she barked, snapping her fingers. "*Todo.* Take it all." Marîa reiterated the little list of items she was to buy, scooped the money into her apron, and padded out.

Thelma returned to the parlor. Xantippia, lean and dirty, her long Persian fur tangled and shedding, sidled against Thelma's legs as she sagged limply into the decrepit porfirio-diaz armchair. Idly she scratched her finger nails into the cat's fur, ignoring a silent meow. Beside her in the ashtray she found half of a cigarette and lit it. Being without money made her feel empty, used up. She knew she could borrow another fifty pesos at the Institute, but that would only last a few days. Rent, paying back what she had already borrowed, and Marîa's salary would devour her next check, and the merry-go-round would be whirling again. She had considered letting the maid go, but Marîa had insisted on staying, having no other place to sleep. Unable to bear the guilt of not being provident, Thelma continued to pay her.

The leftover cigarette had an acrid taste. A fringe of bitterness played with her smile as she remembered how disgusted Tommy had been when he'd brought his wife for a week's visit. He had hardly seemed like her son—more like a former son, she thought, transposed into a too-early adulthood, as though he had skipped half a decade and was suddenly closer to her in age. "Grandmother Foxhall," she muttered to herself, grinding the cigarette into shreds in the ashtray. Grandmothers were supposed to have gray hair and perpetually sweet smiles and live in neat little cottages on the outskirts of little towns. She was only forty-two. And broke.

"Damn!" Maliciously she yanked the cat's tail and watched the animal scurry over the record player into the hall. Of all things, its being broken was worst. Tommy she could do without, but the silence was unbearable.

The phone rang just after Marîa returned. "*Sî, estâ la señora,*" Thelma heard the maid parrot in a rapid singsong. "*Pa'usted, señora!*" But Thelma was already out of the armchair. "Please," she whispered, her hand over the mouthpiece, "somebody please invite me to dinner!"

"*Bueno.*"

"*Bueno,*" a man's voice, vaguely familiar, echoed. Then, with a slight laugh, "Señora Foxhall?" Despite the Mexican intonations, she detected an American accent.

"This is Thelma Foxhall," she said in English.

"Hi. This is Phil Reger."

For a moment the name hung, meaningless, before her mind. Then, with a solid thrust of feeling, the past opened, and Phil's face and voice spun long unused remembrances into focus. "Phil! My God! When did you get back?"

"Yesterday."

"Are you here to stay?"

He mumbled an incoherent syllable; she could picture him shrugging. "Yes. I couldn't take it," he said, his tone more serious. "I think God's gone to sleep again. His people up there are trying to blow the world to hell."

"I said you'd be back."

"I'm back." He laughed hollowly. *He hasn't changed,* she thought, *he probably doesn't even look older.* "I thought maybe you could treat a starving gringo to a meal," he said.

In quick desperation she looked at faded walls and antiquated furniture, at Marîa's blank face, visible above the partition that separated the kitchen from the part of the hallway used as a dining room. "Of course," she said, trying to keep her voice pleasant. "Come over, I'll give you a meal. Not a treat, just a meal."

"Beans and rice?"

"Just rice. I can't afford beans." Irritated by her own bluntness, she tried to soften her manner. "Take the street car—the one that goes down Chapultepec Zaragosa fifty-seven—right by the market. It's easy to find."

"Zaragosa fifty-seven," Phil repeated, enunciating his retreat carefully. "Fine. I'll be there—within an hour. As soon as I can get a street car."

The rice will be ready," she chirruped, her attempt at cheerfulness failing. "Don't forg—"

"Thelma?" he interrupted quickly.

"Yes?"

"Thanks." Very faintly she heard the self-denigrating little laugh he used to apostrophe his rare moments of sentimentality. "Thelma," he sighed, "it's good to talk to you again."

She put on a cotton dress and combed her hair. For a while she tried to read, but neither of the books she picked up engrossed her interest. Swishing restlessly about the parlor, she looked more closely at the cotton dress, remembering it was one Tommy had teased her about wearing. "It makes you look like a displaced teenager," he had said. Besides, it didn't match the apartment. Afraid the contrast would shock Phil, she put on a brown skirt and matching wool sweater. *Phil would remember me this way.* A spurt of anger intercepted the reverie. "You'd think he was a long lost lover, the way I'm acting," she mumbled.

"*Mande, señora?*" Marîa's inquisitive oval peeped around the corner of the bookcase.

"*Nada, nada, nada.*" Choking on the weary re-arousal of her anger, Thelma strode back through the parlor. Without thinking, she lifted the lid of the record player and squinted at the title beneath a thin film of dust on the turntable. *Rachmaninoff: Symphony #2 in e minor.* She tried to imagine its filling the small room, the heavy theme merging into successively higher octaves, then cresting into a topple of thin violin sound. Her eyes blurred until it seemed the record was spinning, lifting her as the theme grew more complex. the strings blending with the weightier counterpoint of reed instruments. A pause, then the scurry of melody being introduced, blending again, lifting. . .

"*Está'l timbre!*" shouted Marîa, scampering barefooted into the parlor. "*Quiere que la'bra yo?*"

"*Abralo.*" Thelma sighed, waiting until the footsteps scuffled out of hearing before closing the record player. Don't

have changed, Phil she thought, pinching her cheeks until they hurt. Please don't have changed.

She held both hands out to receive him. He took them, smiling, and nodded an approval that made her feel at ease. Except that a thinness creased deeper maturity into his cheeks, he looked the same. His dark hair was short and his brown eyes snapped at her with defensive alertness. "I was going to bring some beer," he said, releasing her grasp, "but I didn't want to pay the deposit for the bottles.I thought you'd have some empties."

She caught herself staring at the five-peso note he gave Marîa. "So you're back," she said, waving him toward a chair by the room's long uncurtained window. "Sit down, sit down. Tell me about the United States."

He was pleased—she could tell he was pleased to see her—and despite his bitterness could not restrain his smile.

"I was lost up there—they're mad, the whole country's mad." He laughed, making fun of his own incoherency. "I don't know. I tried and I couldn't take it. Cars, money, television, that's all anybody talked about." For a moment he withdrew, as though to inspect the dark edges of his mood.

"No," he corrected, "that's too trite. It was something else. My fingers couldn't touch anything, feel anything. My parents, the people I used to know—but my parents, mostly—seemed caught in a laundromat of superficialities. Nobody believed in anything, nobody said anything. At first I thought I just wasn't used to it. Then I started wanting Mexico. Finally, I had to come back. No job, no GI Bill left, nothing. But I had to come back."

Thelma nodded. "I remember," she said, "when Pete—Tommy's father—and I went back. . . ." Suddenly she laughed, harshly. "That was fifteen years ago," she said incredulously, meeting Phil's gaze. For a moment, animated by the memories, she had forgotten her surroundings, the penury of her middle-age. "We thought Tommy should go to school in the ol' home country. But we didn't like it. We came back."

"How is Tommy?"

"Fine." The word sprang spontaneously to her lips. For years that had been the queue, and she had always responded perfectly. *How is Tommy? Fine! he. . . .* and on into a mother's dutiful description of her son's activities. But all that had changed; now she didn't care. "I don't know. He's—changed, grown up. He's married now, you know."

"No," Phil said, "I didn't know." He frowned, concealing the flicker of recognition that darted through his glance. "Is that Xantippia?" he asked.

The cat had come out of the parlor and was brushing against Thelma's chair. Gently she reached down and pulled it to her lap. "Yes," she acknowledged, pressing her face against the cat's piqued grimace. "That's Phil, Xanzie. Do you remember Phil?"

"What's happened to her?"

She let the pet drop and searched endtables and windowsills for her cigarettes. "The same thing that's happened to me," she told him, ripping her fingernail through the cellophane and offering one to him. "We're broke, Phil. Hungry, dirty, and broke."

"You're still teaching, aren't you?"

"Yeah." She watched the smoke disintegrate through a crack in the window beside them. "I'm still teaching. But the Institute doesn't pay any more than it ever did. And since Tommy got married—well, I don't get alimony from Pete. One-fifty a month—dollars; that makes a difference."

Phil nodded. The effort of trying to force sympathy through his selfconsciousness made his face seem more mobile. *Disappointed more than anything else,* she decided, *disappointed to find hard times here, too.* No longer the parties, the well-stocked liquor shelf, the expensive meals. Poverty visiting poverty—two people too well-bred, too proud, to lower their standards of living, their expectations.

"I see you still have Marîa."

She laughed, horsily, and was immediately sorry. "Things aren't as black as I paint them," she blurted, trying to atone. "I could get by—if I really tried, if I really wanted to. I could get rid of the phone and do my own laundry—but I keep borrowing. Then I pay back what I borrow and I've nothing left." The cigarette smoke twisted through the sunlight; her shrug, self-deprecating and fitful, called attention to her aloneness. "Phil, I'm sorry. I shouldn't take my troubles out on you."

"I guess I came intending to take mine out on you," he answered softly, the smile trying to gain warmth but restricted to an involuntary bitterness. For a few minutes they looked through the window at the panorama of dirty rooftops and drying clothes. She was prepared for his question when he finally asked it.

"What happened to Ron?"

Closing her eyes, she inhaled deeply, trying to bring the intense, haunting features into full clarity, the smooth thick complexion and eyes like dark windows that exposed the fire burning in his mind, his mother's Japanese blood lurking within the physical bulk of his Danish-American father, setting him apart wherever he was, in whatever he did.

"I quit seeing him, Phil. Tommy came back—it was the year before he got married—and, well, objected. He was afraid Annie's parents—" She smiled wearily and looked at the dirt-stained ceiling; there was nothing more to say. "Ron's in Los Angeles now, married, working. He sends me cards for my birthday and Christmas."

Coughing uncomfortably, Phil examined his hands. "Everything's gone wrong, hasn't it?"

"Not wrong, Phil. I've just been left behind, that's all, and can't catch up. I have to hurry to live and can't hurry anymore."

He nodded, still uncomfortable. The hallway door slammed, and he looked up, surprised, then relaxed when he recognized Marîa. "Good," he said, "the beer," and got up to open a bottle for each of them.

"You make me feel so—so helpless," he told Thelma. "I wish I could do something—for the whole world, really, but especially you." His snicker, self-conscious and apologetic, punctuated his hostility. "The whole world's a mess, a horrible accident, some kind of bad joke. There's no room in it for—for people like—" He withheld the plural pronoun, adjusting the reference to fit "—you." A short, brutal laugh strode over his sentiment, obscuring it. "If I were God, Thelma, I'd change everything, just for you."

"Thanks, Phil," she answered, getting up to prod Marîa to set the table and serve the *caldo.* Then, returning, "You have, just by being here. At least, you understand."

He stayed until dusk. Thelma walked downstairs with him. The street, in the twilight, no longer seemed so dreary. The corners were smoothed, and the dirt and harsh colors blended into riper, more earthy grays. Even auto horns seemed muted, and the people trudging up the incline from the market were silent.

Phil promised to come again and gave her the phone number of the apartment in which he was staying with a friend. Despite a glow of pleasure, she felt depressed—Phil wasn't going anywhere either; he was more determinedly bitter and less fun to talk to. And, despite his samenesses, he was older. And broke.

She shrugged, unable to support the weight of continued concern, and returned to the apartment. At the landing she paused to look at her watch. Just enough time to bathe before going to Nit Su.

She backed the sputtering LaSalle into a parking place across from the dimly lit temple and, for a moment, sat in the comfortable darkness finishing her cigarette. The temple's beige stucco walls blended in size and coloration with the residential dwellings on either side; a faint, cloudy-blue light steamed through the thickly draped and grated windows.

Throwing the cigarette away, she closed her eyes and began the breathing exercises, preparing herself for the long, slow entrance into spirituality, the shedding of the extraneous nonlife that clogged her bloodstream and nervous system. Finally, calm and pleasantly expectant, she got out of the car and crossed the street.

The outside gate was unlocked. She went through into a little patio and, on the steel-framed door that was the main entrance to the temple, knocked three times, paused, knocked once, paused, and knocked three times again. It swung open, and Mountshi, the Gatekeeper, a slender young American with limpid eyes and a pale complexion, bowed and touched his right hand to his heart, his navel, and his loins in formal greeting. She responded with the same gesture and went into the anteroom, where incense and blue-veiled electric lanterns softened the atmosphere.

Four other mendicants were sitting on a blue *petate*, legs crossed and hands folded over their chests. Three of them wore the white togas of novices and sat apart, occasionally twitching as their attempts at concentration wavered. The fourth, Rissis, a short bespectacled American, was one of Nit Su's highest practitioners. He wore a robe of deep blue and sat in total absorption, scarcely breathing.

In order not to disturb the novices, Thelma took off her shoes before climbing the uncarpeted stairs. The preparation room was painted a deep blue and illuminated by small-watt bulbs plugged into the wall outlets. Closing the door, Thelma fell to her knees and pressed her fingertips against her forehead to destroy disrupting thoughts, against her lips, her medulla, her solar plexis, and her groin to destroy the other obstructions to perfect priesthood (words, excitements, breaths, desires). Rising, she disrobed and went to the wall closet, where her white-fringed robe of a full initiate was hanging. Quickly, struggling to remain without thought, she slipped into it and fell to her knees to hum a prayer for strength to continue.

At the altar, converted from a fireplace and surrounded by blue-and-white puebla tile, she made obeisance, kissing her fingertips and placing them against the edge of the low prayer table set in the opening, then prostrated herself and laid her forehead against it. Again she hummed a *mantram*, the final preparation before entering the Pure-No-Thing worship below.

Rissis and the novices were still there. Dutifully bowing toward him, she sank into *samadhi* position a short distance away, legs crossed, hands folded

beneath her breasts, and resumed her control of the five obstructions, trying to drive from her outerworld being the fragments of frustration and desire still lingering there.

Gradually she began to emerge, the petals of superficial consciousness and physical awareness peeling away and wilting in the depths. The strange special fluid she associated with realization eased out of her stomach, spreading its calm exciting warmth through her chest and arms and face. Destroying her breathing entirely, she waited in giddy expectancy for the last bond of sensuality to break and release her to contemplation.

Free! Filled with deep, pure delight, she lunged into full breathing, the entire potentiality of her lungs thrusting her beyond time and space into sweeping slashes of unrooted color. *Free!* Completely, ecstatically, beyond all commonplace, occupying a physical body only for convenience, only because the soul needed earthly roots, she soared into experience that transcended need.

Free! Free! Free! Brilliant colors whipped past her mind as her inner spirit elevated her into space, beyond color, beyond sound—

Quickly she got up, bowed to Rissis and the novices, and hurried to the Chamber-of-All-Life.

A small blue floodlight etched a circular radiance against the ceiling; the rest of the room was dark. A guitarist was strumming flamenco in a far corner and, at intervals, a tall Mexican girl glided an impromptu ballet through the tube of light.

Thelma stood quietly, waiting for her freed spirit to direct her, to flame into being and fill the serene No-Thing-ness of *samadhi* with vital energy. Attracted by the music, she began to hum, remembering the broken record player in her apartment, and immediately expelled the frustration by releasing a high toneless moan. Weaving back and forth, caught by remembrance of the difficult melody, she opened her mind and heart to participation with the shafts of beauty rising from her imagination and blending with the soft strident guitar. Someone in the dark room, infected with her spirit, raised a voice in chant, rousing her to an interaction of free-floating lives meeting beyond the confines of walls and darkness.

Time lost its dimensions; the limitless purity of the unknown swept her away, dissolving animosities, filling her with the wonder and glow of total, unfettered joy. Desireless, she burst through the veils of personality into a vastness so complete and inspiring it obliterated even her ability to feel.

Only gradually did perceptivity return, individual strands of pale blue reweaving into the patterns of her life. She was perspiring and her throat was dry. Her skin tingled, as though impurities had physically burst through it, purging her of decay. Sinking to the floor, she thricefold repeated obeisance, thankful to her spirit for having given her realization, thankful to Nit Su for having cleased her soul.

In order not to inadvertently contaminate herself from others, she hurried out of the Chamber-of-All-Life and, stripping off her robe, slid feet first into the pool of frigid water in the inner patio. The shock of it took her breath but restored her immediately to *maya-sat*—the world of physical form.

Her elation disappeared quickly. The seat cushions of the car were dirty, and the tear along one seam was as noticeable as it had been before. She lit a cigarette and blew a cloud of smoke against the windshield. Purged, cleansed, a new being; but immediately

the boredom and loneliness descended again, before she could drive away.

She didn't want to go back to the apartment. Although she knew without looking how low the gas tank was, she flicked the dashlights and examined the gauge. Just enough to get to San Angel and back into town again Monday.

Angrily she pounded the flat of her hand against the steering wheel. Sometimes, after Nit Su, she sat at a sidewalk table in front of Las Americas, drinking coffee or beer and watching the crowd disperse after the last movie. I wish Phil were with me. But Phil had other friends, bachelors his own age. El Casino was the only alternative. Sometimes a few of the teachers who had Saturday night classes at the Institute stopped there on their way home.

Twelve blocks. I've walked it before. But she never remembered having felt as empty. Purged and cleansed, but after the descent to ordinary existence disillusioned and empty. She imagined that prisoners felt the same way after awakening from dreams to face the dreariness of their cell walls again.

She strolled casually through the modern brittle atmosphere of the cafe, playing the scene well. She smiled and said, "*Buenos noches*" to the cashier and lifted her eyebrows as she scanned the booths, hoping to see someone she knew.

"*Quiere una mesa?*"

'*No. Yo busco a unos amigos. Pero no estân ellos.*"

The waiter nodded and hurried away. Slowly she turned to leave. At a table near the entrance, four Americans—students, she guessed—were laughing and drinking coffee. In front of them the remnants of expensive meals glistened on their plates. *God, am I hungry!* One of the men, uninquisitive young face perched atop a thin, bright blade of necktie, glanced at her, then looked away, as though not aware of having seen her. "Damn you" she cursed beneath her breath, shoving aside the temptation to introduce herself, join them. "They would only laugh at me," she told herself, trying to suppress animosity as she started back toward the car.

Detouring through the dark, narrow streets, she tried to enjoy picturesque little sequences her glances into lighted patios and curtained windows exposed. But her mind would not surrender itself to aesthetic appreciation. Memories of Tommy jogged out of her unconscious. Tommy and his friends, sitting around the big living room of the plush apartment she and he had rented in Colonia Napolés, listening to music, talking, filling her life with pleasant tumult. Tommy. And behind the image of his youthful exuberance, the shadowy infiltration of Ron's face and gestures. For the sake of her son she had surrendered a strong man's love. Now both child and lover were gone.

In front of her car she glanced at the temple. A soft spiritual iridescence shone through the draped window. Through Nit Su she had purged herself of the unclean, of the nonlife, and it had left her vacant, without anything. The return to the superficial was the hardest part of all. *If only I could stay up there, all the time. If only I didn't have to come back. . . !*

She drove out Insurgentes. A block beyond the Alemân overpass she passed a young Mexican standing alone under a street light; his neat dark suit fit him with youthful dignity, and his face, flicking up as she passed, was tiny and handsome. For a moment her thoughts turned inward, contemplating the insufficiency and loneliness of his pos-

ture. Impulsively she swung off the wide thoroughfare, into the parallel esplanade, and circled the block.

"*Hola!*" she shouted, leaning across the front seat to crank the window open. "*Quiere que le lleve yo?*"

He started to open the door, then—muttering an indistinct syllable of surprise—backed away in confusion. "*Perdone, perdone señorita,*" he mumbled, abetting his apology with quick, denigrating gestures, "*creîa yo que.*"

The full force of her embarrassment struck at once. She stomped the gas pedal and swerved drunkenly back into traffic, almost colliding with a pickup despite its bleating horn. *A queer! I try to pick up a man and he turns out to be a queer!*

Still balanced on a teetertotter between hilarity and tears, she fled up the stairs into the heavy solitude of her ancient apartment. Marîa had gone; Xantippia was asleep on the windowsill. Thelma thumbed through a stack of paperbacks, then wandered into the kitchen, hoping to find a *bolillo* left over from lunch. Nothing—apparently the maid had taken them to munch on. Disgruntled, Thelma started to light a *delicado* but, noticing how few remained in the pack, pushed it back and ransacked ashtrays for a smokable stub.

"A queer," she muttered, pushing the ashtray of butts with her thumb. "Maybe I'm lucky he was." She tried to laugh, remembering his shocked expression, but the deserted apartment seemed waiting to haunt her with echoes and she drew back from the sound. For a long time she stood at the window, gazing at the gray reflection of her face on the dark glass. *I wonder what Ron would say.*

In the parlor she picked up one of the books she had been reading that afternoon and huddled in the dim light But without music she couldn't concentrate and quickly became annoyed. *Phil might know someone who could fix the record player.* She found the slip of paper on which he had scribbled his number and went to the phone. For a moment she hesitated, unsure of her motives, but her attempt to evaluate them blurred into the emotionless objectivity of wanting the record player fixed.

"Hello," an unfamiliar nasal voice drawled.

"'Is—?" she began, again hesitating. A bar of subdued music, atonal and monotonous, came through the receiver. "Is Phil Reger there, please?"

"Just a minute," the nasal voice grumbled, "I'll wake him."

She tried to call the voice back, to tell it not to bother, but the clunk of the phone against wood and the muffled sound of a door slamming had already interrupted their communication. Half turning, she leaned against the wall and let her gaze wander over the hallway's gray shoddiness. *Phil would enjoy hearing about the queer.* He liked that sort of thing—the wry, ironic twists that wrenched meaning from life. . . .

"Hello, Thelma?"

"Yes. How did you know it was me?"

"No one else knows I'm staying here."

"Oh."

His self-conscious laughter filled the gap in conversation. "What did you—? I mean, why—?"

"Phil, I—" Across the room, near the ridge of cement that substituted for baseboard along the wall beneath the long table, she saw a pile of crumbled plaster. Slowly she gazed upward; a chalky white octagon dangled beside a hole in the ceiling, and little festoons of dust trailed down from it. The rush of tears and sobs lasted only a few seconds; choking and sniveling, she brought her mood under control, too

ashamed of her outbreak to continue trying to pretend. "I'm sorry, Phil. I—I don't know. I was going to call—I mean, I wanted to find out—" But it was impossible and absurd; finding some one to fix the phonograph had been an excuse, and Phil would see through the artifice. "I've had an awful night. I wanted someone to talk to, that's all."

"Sure," he said uncomfortably. "let's talk."

The festoons of dust twisted and the large octagon of plaster swayed, trying to break the few threads that still held it aloft. *Let's talk.* But there was nothing to say. She couldn't tell him about Nit Su—he wouldn't have believed the beauty of the freedom she'd achieved, even if she were able to describe it. And she couldn't tell him about the queer, without having to explain the temporary blindness of her desperation not to be alone.

"What shall we talk about?" he asked, his voice fitting the impatience of the music droning through the background.

"What shall we talk about?" she echoed wearily. "I don't know, Phil—what is there to talk about?" Her laugh, short and cryptic, mimicked the timid throatiness of his. "Let's talk about God," she suggested, rancorously. For a moment the slender vision of a beam of light slitting the darkness of the Chamber-of-All-Life occurred to her; its contrast with chipping plaster and dust made her shiver. "God's okay," she said gruffly, no longer concerned about his response. "God's okay, Phil, it's not His fault. It's just—just this long damned lonesome wait."

Phil's heavy breathing was interrupted by incoherent little grunts of rejected conversation. Thelma sighed, realizing the futility of talking to him, "I'm sorry I called," she mumbled, lifting the phone away from her ear. From her hand, his slender, anxious voice piped through its embarrassment. "Is there—anything I can do?"

"No," she replied, "nothing you can do." Naked in the aftermath of anger and want, she closed her eyes and let them blur into a mist of dry hatefulness, as she dropped the receiver back into place.

Vietnam

• **Paul Ramsey**

The hopscotch is blindfold. Nonetheless we play.
Tell the corners, build the crossings, go and come away.
Rest not. Want not. Seed the tide of sun!
One is a doing. Do it, and undone.
Leapfrogs near you. Will you trot?
Have a mercy. Have a fire-raid. Have another knot.

Two Poems

• Judy Dunn

Vesper Dome

Slowly up the sandy height we climbed
And waited, silent in our visionary
Dome, pillared under three-and-ninety
Winds unblown, mortal to the dawn. Then
Whining down the darkness came a measured
Wind, and tall, dark-speared pines made
Slantings far behind our waiting-hall.
    There we bore witness to what men will
    Dream upon the sea, as wind-prints, like
    Ancient writings, traced upon the sand,
    Marking where those old visions came
    Real, a palimpsest from Clotho's hand.
    The sea was wild with emerald lights, broken
    And glass-spattered; flannel gulls in slanted
    Flight tilted up, then tipping lower down,
    Plunged into popping foam, whirred
    Away in sound.
The wind came again,
As if some phantasmal wind-harps of
Forgotten lands spun their lone, abandoned
Tunes over spiral swellings, and we saw
A slow procession of ashen nuns moving
In ancient requiem, sullen rhythm
Along the pale and profiled shore. Prismal
Sand, shot through with every color,
Stained mosaics in the neutral land.
    Far more we saw, huddled in our
    Palace of the night; but not for telling.
    What dreams have run down upon your
    Grayer towns I have wondered, sliding
    Down through razored grass. Your domes
    For singing, laughing, even prayer,
    Have lasted through fall till summer. But
    They are all of time, none of wonder.

Spider's Fool

She slowly hangs warm thread
Between web-spokes of light-specked silk
Glistening in angles of sticky gilt.
Cautious, she lays down sagging lines
And creeps along her bridges until
Her death-net has no beginning,
No end, then descends soundless down
Her silken line and waits her fool.

The Broken Iconoclast

• **Brendan Galvin**

After the maze of mirrors, when a laugh
Was sharp enough to slice my breath in half,
I charged outside and tried to take the town,
Cursing each brick by name to bring it down
On my own head, my flag-red fear unfurled.
O smiler, till your soft siege cracked my frown,
I was the Hamlet of the Underworld.

To My Mother

• **R. F. Kaczorowski**

I put her love on this morning
with my clothes. It slipped on
easy as a T-shirt,
secure and caressing,
warm as the sweaters that
her tired hands would knit for me.
    Other mornings, I'd grab it from my
    drawer, and
    throw it in my briefcase just for luck.
    Or, in the manner of a raincoat,
    I'd drape it on my elbow
    to throw about my shoulders in a storm.

Automat

• **Paul Kelly**

in the morning paper:
a man was shot
stealing beer, running away;
in black and white, half hid in darkness,
he lay bleeding in the street
    and they developed the shots
    in a nearby darkroom, glosses
    by the latest techniques,
    cut and dried them in a matter of minutes,
    wirefaxed immediately throughout the service;
    in time for tomorrow morning's early edition,
    then to be snipped and filed and forgotten.
If you look closely enough,
you lose the image; thousands of tiny dots
individually transmitted over copper wires.
    Over luncheon coffee
    I still watch him dying.

Woman with Aquarium

• Sister Maura, S.S.N.D.

In the fluid world she hobby-created,
there was no stagnancy, no inching pond scum,
no whorl and scream of garbage-inflated

gulls. She forbade dark, deplored the thrum
of frail ripples. She instructed her maid
to purify the water, daily syphoning it from

the tank at regular hours. She overpaid
for the inhabitants: rare, bluevined angelfish,
a white albino catfish; curious, jade—

streaked mollies, and—under willowish
reeds — a prize loach male (brassy blue and red)
to whom she carried on a delicate dish

a tweezerpinch of fresh lobster on which he fed.

Litany

• Nancy J. Wiegel

Praise my father
waiting for death,
waiting as a lost child waits
for someone to find him,
as a willow waits for its leaves.

Praise my father
courting his death,
like a troubadour singing
to it, like an amorous prince
lifting the countless green veils
of his bride.

Praise my father
greeting his death,
making it welcome, folding
the linen and silk of his skin back
that death might sleep in him
warmly; giving his guest
the keys to his gardens and gold.

Praise my father,
his going and goal.
April will imitate him with tulips;
heroes will carve his bright name
on their swords.

At the Frontiers of Knowledge

• Minna F. Weinstein

Today I saw a man who told me about rats.
He puts silver electrodes with ebony tentacles
Into their skulls.
It's minor surgery.
Waves of pleasures and pains advance on their brains
Like armies of liberation cannonading continents
With pieces of slogans.
And one or two shells.
Ugly little, hairy little paws claw at chromium pedals
To punctuate and paragraph the clinical debate
Between an academic baron
And a scholarly marquis.
Three quantified doses of torment bring one of unqualified bliss
In a frenzied waltz, a spasmed search
For the canyons of truth
And the hollows of life.
Robots and sunspots and the functions of glands.
Little letters and numbers and white sterile men.
The rapture of knowing.
The smashing of toys.

Overpass 6 A M

• Sister Maura, S.S.N.D.

Two laconic newsboys stand on the overpass
staring down trucks lunging flour
out of Minneapolis. Accurately they spit
an asterisk of ego on a cab.

Soon the university will move
as surely as a vowel following a glide.
Now this moment, unique as a thumbprint
asserts itself.

Modes of darkness are buffeted
into the underground garage;
death is stoppered in a tube at Mayo's.

On the overpass, wooden planks
are bright as morning grass with dew.
Feet begin the sensuous adventure up the rise;
body aligns itself to stride;
spirit to ancient imperishable hope.

Lux Perpetua

• Richard Loomis

Who says it's right to mourn the dead?
They stand about us full of knowing,
Their whole life gathered to a pearl of light
Cupped in their burning hands.

Found and Lost

• T. Alan Broughton

She found the turtle
after the mowers passed
rattling their blades that cut him
out of the matted grass,
and brought him in to us
cupped in her hands
as carefully as water.
"Heal it," is what
her motions said
as she kneeled beside it
on the rug. Her mother and I
restrained ourselves and tried to show
some sympathy for the way it moved
its head out turning from side to side,
eyes blinking as though coming fresh
from centuries of dark,
and circling lame
because one side had limbs,
the other bled a sluggish mucus.
We put him in a bowl with grass
which helped to make him
seem more natural,
hiding his wound.
"He's getting well," she said
before she went to bed that night,
having begged special permission
to come down after her story
to say goodnight, to gravely peer
at the armored head, the eyes
looking like nightmares that
I tried to diminish by smiling.

I was the one to see him last,
descending to turn out
some forgotten light
after the others had fallen to sleep.
I looked through the glass
to all those years
and the darkened grass
to where he lay at rest.
The room we kept together
was black bone, and only
one slight lamp by the window
let us see each other eye to eye.
He stared me down, I turned
upstairs to climb away from him
to wait for light,
leaving him all the lower
house to lie in
brooding even in sleep,
our maimed and ancient guest.

The Old Man

• **Nathan Cervo**

You will find him on the bench,
His smile all rags, and his great eyes unwashed.
If you sit by him and hum,
The tangles of his feet will move.
And should you say you remember a time
When a young man
Stood in the door
On Ascension Thursday,
While the mantled plaster saint went by,
His spittle will tremble down on his vest.
Or should you speak of Eternal Rest
And its beauties,
His heart will come out of his pocket,
And he'll try to gobble it down
Before you see.
Finally, you'll observe if you turn back
And catch him
(After you've had your sharp fun with him),
His waving fingers become fluttering
Leaves that glide
Like pale wings
At his shoulders.
You'll laugh out loud at that old goose!

Contributors

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